No. 637.] For Week Ending March 16, 1901. [One Penny.

Short Stories

A Weekly Magazine for Home and Train

In a Sedan Chair

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SHORT STORIES.

No. 637.] For the Week Ending March 16th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

A Keeper of Secrets

By R. NORMAN SILVER.

Being Days in the Professional Life of the late Mr. Hugo Pontifex, the Famous West-end Solicitor.

To those who had only met him casually in Society, the late Mr. Pontifex was a good-tempered mystery. Bluff, handsome, and, in spite of his middle-age, a little of a dandy, he seemed the last man in the world to deserve his reputation, which was that of the keenest, most audacious, and unerring of family lawyers. Fair-haired, and powerful as an athlete, his striking appearance was increased by his eyes, one of which was grey and one blue.

In reality, however, Hugo Pontifex had a wide and almost exclusively aristocratic practice. He seldom brieted a barrister, seldom set foot in a court of justice, but single handed he hunted down, captured, and safely buried mystery after mystery of terrible import to Mayfair and Belgravia.

An expert in strangling scandal, he lived a life of enthralling interest, and died a rich man. When his executors went through his papers they found nothing to satisfy their curiosity, though plenty to excite it. Hugo Pontifex knew the value of fire—and the dangers of ink. But from time to time he related to the writer, who enjoyed a certain measure of his confidence, the incidents which form the basis of the following stories. In speaking of these strange fragments of drama, Mr. Pontifex himself employed fictitious names, the present author being left to guess vainly at the identity of the genuine actors.

THE INCIDENT AT THE RED VILLAS.

THE window of Mr. Pontifex's private room looked out upon St. James' Street and was peculiarly high and narrow.

The blind hung always to the middle bar of the sashes, and a tall panel of wire gauze screened the apartment from the glance of the passer-by.

Mr. Pontifex, however, saw most of what went on in the famous thoroughfare, and many an actual and possible client traversed the solicitor's field of vision without dreaming how closely they had been scrutinized by the sharpest eyes in London.

As Mr. Pontifex, early one bright October morning, sat opening his letters, he was aware that, on the other side of the gauze panel, a pair of dashing greys were drawing to the kerb a small landau, in which, nestling among furs, there swayed the figure of a young girl. A moment the lawyer studied the pretty face, with its large dark orbs, its rippling, childish curls on brow and temples, and its clearly-cut, aristocratic features. Then he occupied himself once more with his correspondence.

He was soon interrupted by a tap at the door beyond which the deaf clerk kept his invariable guard. Absent mindedly, Mr. Pontifex called to him to enter. The stooping form shuffled across the floor in its shabby garments and laid a card on the writing-table. The solicitor scanned it. It read:

MISS MURIEL WAKEFORD.

"Show her in," commanded Mr. Pontifex, still absorbed in his letters.

The clerk retreated with his usual clumsy quietness. When he reappeared it was to announce the caller. The lawyer looked up, throwing off his preoccupation. To his surprise he beheld the very figure that had so recently been visible through his office window.

Miss Muriel Wakeford was as nervous as she was handsome, and as handsome as she was well-dressed. For an instant she gazed anxiously at the solicitor. After a searching inspection of his acute countenance, she inquired falteringly:

"Mr. Pontifex, I believe?"

"The same," said Mr. Pontifex, smiling at the simple caution of his charming client; "what can I have the pleasure——?" He paused suggestively.

The visitor pushed her fur cloak from her young shoulders.

"Please!" she answered eagerly, "I want you to help me out of the most awful trouble I was ever in. They say you are very clever and kind, and that you never, never let things get into the papers."

"I shall hope to sustain my reputation in your service, Miss Wakeford," replied the solicitor; "but may I not learn what I am to keep out of the papers?"

Muriel Wakeford coloured up to her brown lashes.

"I—I am engaged," she stammered, "or, at least, I was—oh, dear, how am I going to start! Mr. Pontifex, I'm to be married in a month, and what I shall do if you don't help me, I can't imagine."

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Mr. Pontifex smiled again, in spite of himself.

"Hadn't you better begin at the beginning?" he observed. "I think I might grasp the case more easily in that fashion."

"Forgive me!" begged his pretty client. "You see, it's this way. I'm in love with Mr. Allan Temple; we have known one another since we were boy and girl. But we didn't realise that we cared for each other till about six months ago, when Albert—he is Allan's twin brother—began to show me a lot of attention. Then our eyes were opened, and Allan and I knew that we—we loved one another, and that we always had done. So we engaged ourselves, just before I went to Nice with Aunt Margery."

"Wait until I return," Pontifex instructed, and they saw him vanish into the night.

Mr. Pontifex nodded gravely—to indicate that he had appreciated these momentous details.

"Well," pursued Miss Wakeford, "Allan and I wrote regularly, and at last there came a dreadful piece of news. Albert had taken my engagement with Allan so much to heart, they said, that it had turned his brain. They had been obliged to shut him up, with a doctor to take charge of him, in one of the garrets of the house in Regent's Park—the Temples live in Regent's Park when they are in town. Allan is exactly half-an-hour older than Albert, so he inherited all his uncle's fortune. But he has always given Albert a good allowance, and I thought it just like him when he wrote me that he was having a resident specialist and doing everything that was possible for the poor fellow."

Mr. Pontifex bent his bushy brows—he was listening shrewdly to Muriel Wakeford's disjointed story.

"I came back from Nice," continued Muriel, hesitatingly; "and—and Allan and I were often together, as we had been before. Yet I felt as if we had drifted miles apart in the few weeks we had been separated, and I even caught myself wondering how I could ever have imagined myself in love with him. Finally, I tried to break off the engagement, but he was too determined for me, and Aunt Margery began to arrange for the — the wedding. That frightened me, for I had made up my mind that, whether I ever had loved Allan or not, I didn't love him now."

Muriel Wakeford leant across the writing-table by which she was seated.

"Yesterday," she said, "the truth flashed upon me, and I understood why my love for Allan seemed dead. Allan Temple isn't Allan at all, but Albert."

Mr. Pontifex had commenced to twist his sapphire ring—an infallible sign that he was deeply interested. His client proceeded, encouraged by the lawyer's calm reception of this astounding statement.

"Allan and Albert," she added, "were so alike from childhood that when they became older Allan wore a moustache and Albert didn't, in order that people might distinguish them. For years that has been the only striking difference between them. And now, absurd as it may sound, Mr. Pontifex, I am positive that the man who calls himself Allan Temple, whom I am supposed to love, and whom I am actually about to marry, is, in reality, Albert Temple, whom I always feared, perhaps almost hated. He has grown a moustache such as Allan wore, and the disguise is sufficient for everyone in the world but me. And, if I had not loved Allan, I, too, should have been deceived."

"In that case," demanded the solicitor coolly," who is the unfortunate gentleman that is asserted to be mad?"

Muriel shuddered.

"It—it must be my poor darling," she murmured; "that is, if anybody is mad. This is what I want you to find out for me, Mr. Pontifex. If the person who is believed to be Albert is Allan all the time, then I am certain that he isn't the least bit mad, but that Albert has only shut him up in order to take his place and try to marry me; and, if he is a prisoner in that wretched house, Mr. Pontifex, he must be set free, whatever it costs. I can pay; my money is my own now—I was twenty-one last birthday."

Muriel Wakeford looked very lovely as she made this spirited speech; had not Mr. Pontifex been lost in a reverie, he would doubtless have admired her extremely. But he was engrossed in his sapphire ring, which he had been twisting industriously for fully five minutes. It stopped merely that Mr. Pontifex might reach to a sheet of scribbling-paper.

"May I ask for the address of the Temples' house in

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Regent's Park," he observed, picking up his favourite pen-holder of gold and cornelian.

"Number twelve, Romanoff Avenue," replied his client, impressed, as were all who had similar experience of Hugo Pontifex, by his quiet directness.

"And your own address?" queried the lawyer. Miss Wakeford repeated it—it was that of a mansion in the dull but wealthy locality of Portman Square.

"Thank you," concluded Mr. Pontifex, touching the bell at his elbow; "as soon as I have anything to report, you shall hear from me. Meanwhile, if I may be pardoned a word of advice, Miss Wakeford, keep your suspicions to yourself. Good morning!"

As the door closed behind the graceful young figure, Mr. Pontifex began to slip off his frock-coat. In its stead he donned a loose jacket and the same unfashionable overcoat that he had chosen from his professional wardrobe for that expedition into Soho, which proved of such importance to the Bantry peerage. A flat-topped felt hat dealt a final blow to his legal appearance.

Mr. Pontifex hung up his frock-coat and glossy "silk" in the capacious corner-cupboard, locked away the rings that ordinarily glittered upon his white hands, and took a heavy umbrella. Thus equipped, he passed out through his private door, and chartered a hansom to convey him in the direction of Regent's Park.

Half-an-hour later he was surveying Number Twelve, Romanoff Avenue, having dismissed his cab at a hundred yards distance, and approached his goal on foot.

Number Twelve was a huge, semi-detached villa of red-brick—four stories and a basement, with ample garden. The loftiest floor had, in the middle, an ornamental dormer window, with a pointed roof. This window was spanned, from sill to lintel, with stout horizontal bars. Mr. Pontifex noted this with satisfaction; those bars lent to Miss Wakeford's extravagant statement a kind of support. For the rest, Number Twelve, though conventional, was grim and frowning, especially on an autumn day. Its neighbour, Number Ten, was equally grim and frowning, but much less orderly, being, in fact, to let. Otherwise it was an exact copy of the house with the barred window. Mr. Pontifex read the name of the agent, which was displayed on a discoloured board in the garden, and strolled out of Romanoff Avenue.

When he re-entered that quarter of the Regent's Park district, it was to ascend the steps of Number Ten, and procure admission with a latch-key. He had rented the house—much to the astonishment of the agent—without a preliminary visit to the interior, had paid a quarter in advance, and been yielded possession forthwith. Mr. Pontifex was essentially a man of rapid methods.

The solicitor mounted the dusty staircase that led from the hall to the upper regions. He climbed leisurely to the garret floor, and gained the room with the dormer window.

Unlike the corresponding one in Number Twelve it was not barred, but the casement was set flush with the wall, leaving no ledge or parapet to connect the two villas.

Mr. Pontifex explored the other apartments on the same floor. They were a couple of bare and shallow rooms, illuminated by skylights in the almost level roof.

Muriel looked, and a low cry broke from her lips.

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The lawyer raised the larger of these and swung himself through. He could move easily on the tiles, and attained in a few strides the brick slip that separated the houses.

From where he stood he could see the skylights of Number Twelve. They were both barred by iron rods, screwed down on the outside of the frames.

The solicitor had learnt all that was immediately necessary; he dropped agilely through the skylight by which he had come, brushed the dust from his garments; and went down again into Romanoff Avenue.

The evening was beginning to close in, and he had had no lunch. He found a restaurant, ordered a steak, and abandoned himself to reflection. His meal eaten, he sallied forth, made several small purchases, got into a cab, had himself driven to Portman Square, and sent in his card to Muriel Wakeford.

He had been shown into the library, a splendid, book-lined place, that suggested, by its rare paintings and rich curios, the extent of the fortune his pretty client had fallen heir to. She joined him at once—an anxious little figure in a trailing tea-gown.

"You have been quick," she said; "oh! I do hope it is good news—is it?"

"That depends," decided Mr. Pontifex; "have you a maid you can trust implicitly?"

"Y-yes," replied Muriel Wakeford, her eyes shining with instant excitement.

"That is lucky," answered the solicitor; "then may I ask you to change that charming dress for a plain walking costume, and tell your maid—the one you can trust—to prepare to accompany you. It would be as well for your footman to summon a four-wheeler—we shall need it. With your permission I will wait."

Muriel Wakeford looked at the cool, masterful face of the lawyer, and drew a sharp breath. But Mr. Pontifex said nothing more, and she hurried away to do his bidding. It was not long before a four-wheeled cab left Portman Square. Inside were Mr. Pontifex, Miss Muriel Wakeford, and a puzzled maid-servant. In silence they were carried to the northern fringe of Regent's Park. Here the solicitor checked the driver, paid the fare, and escorted his companions into the sombre and winding roadways that surround Romanoff Avenue.

Muriel Wakeford started as he led them to the gloomy portal of the house adjoining Number Twelve. Yet she ventured no remark until they had entered, and Mr. Pontifex, having produced a tiny dark lantern, was busily putting a match to the wick.

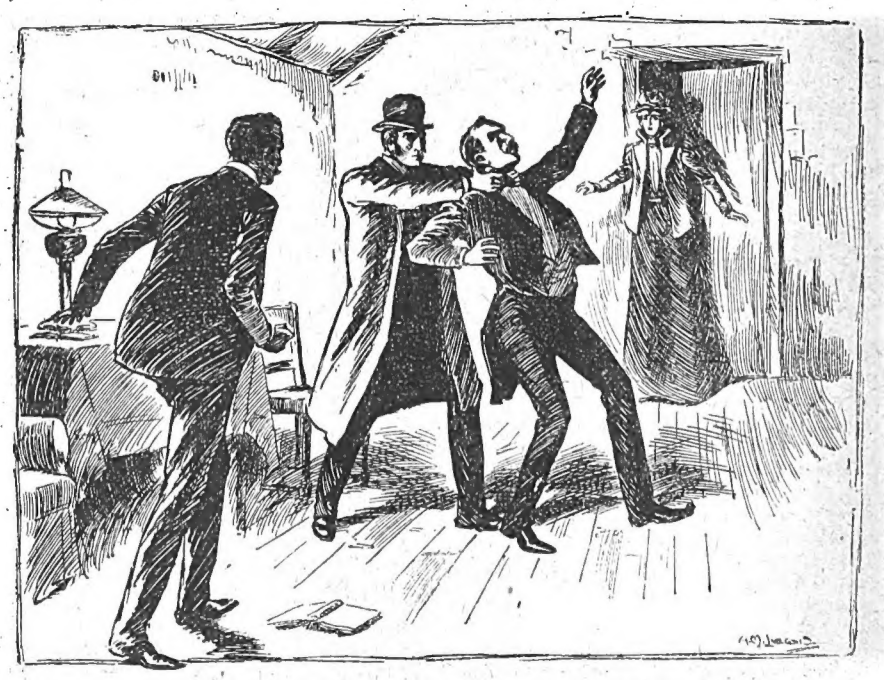
"Am I—are you going to let me see him?" she murmured quiveringly.

"I trust so," responded the lawyer; "you seem to be the only person who can distinguish between the brothers. Naturally, I do not want to make any mistake. But all this is in the nature of an experiment."

Carefully veiling the lantern, that it might not be seen from the street, he pioneered them up the staircases towards the garret. The yellow rays flung mysterious shadows about them as they ascended. Under the skylight by which Mr. Pontifex had investigated the roofs of the red villas, he paused to give the lantern to the maid, and once more swung himself up.

"Wait until I return," he instructed, and they saw him vanish into the night.

Surmounting the brick slip between the tiles of Number Ten and Number Twelve, the lawyer approached the skylights of the latter. One was illuminated—the radiance pierced the darkness with a gilded beam. Mr. Pontifex peered in. In an armchair below there sat a young man, reading. From somewhere in the chamber a light fell full on his countenance. He was melancholy, but handsome, and wore a well-shaped black moustache.



He rose to go, but found himself seized in a grip of steel.

The solicitor retraced his steps to the skylight of Number Ten.

"Help your mistress up," he told the maid. The girl obeyed, and Mr. Pontifex, with a steady contraction of his powerful muscles, was able to draw Muriel Wakeford through the opening. She was very quiet and determined, yet trembled nevertheless.

"Stay where you are," the lawyer ordered her maid, and himself steered his client's course across the roofs. When they were near the illuminated window of Number Twelve, Mr. Pontifex motioned to her to look in. Muriel did so and a low cry broke from her lips.

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"It is Allan," she cried: "oh, my darling, how could they say you were mad?"

The sound of her voice penetrated the glass and Allan Temple glanced up. For an instant he seemed dazed by the sight of those two watchful faces overhead. But a gleam of intelligence and hope came into his bewildered expression and he kissed his hand, presumably, to Muriel Wakeford herself.

Mr. Pontifex, now thoroughly convinced of the accuracy of his client's story, extracted from his breast-pocket a strong screw-driver and commenced to remove the bars of the skylight. Allan Temple waited impatiently till the last one was unfastened, and then pushed open the hinged window.

"Quick!" he panted. "Pull me up—it is nearly time for Albert's daily visit. There is not a moment to be lost."

Muriel would have clasped her lover's hands to execute his wishes, but Mr. Pontifex thrust him back.

"Go slowly!" he said. "Mr. Temple, I am a lawyer, and acting in your interests. Instead of escaping, permit Miss Wakeford and I to share your captivity. I suspect that I am to be saved a great deal of trouble."

To Allan Temple's amazement, he slid through the skylight and assisted his young client to descend by means of a table and a chair. This done, he shut the window and restored the furniture to its former position, too diplomatic to observe that, while he was so engaged, the lovers had indulged in a passionate embrace.

"You say," remarked the solicitor, lowering his tones, "that you are expecting a visit from your brother. Do not waste time in explanations—we have guessed all. Decoy your brother, when he arrives, into discussing his plot, offer to give up your property, your name, and your betrothed, if he will only allow you to go abroad. Let him think your spirit broken—it is necessary for my purpose that he be thrown entirely off his guard."

The rattle of a key in the lock struck on their ears—it was that of the door at the summit of the garret stairs. Mr. Pontifex darted into the furthest of the rooms, taking Muriel Wakeford with him. They were scarcely concealed, when a step was heard in the middle apartment, and a man in evening dress appeared. Save for his costume, he was the living image of Allan Temple. For protection against the pretended lunatic, he bore, dangling from his wrist, a ponderous life-protector.

"Hullo," said the visitor, sitting down; "how are you to-night? Docter Pat tells me you're getting positively reasonable. By Jove, I believe he'll cure you one of these days—the clever little scoundrel!"

And Albert Temple laughed heartily.

"Oh, I'm cured right enough now," sighed Allan, taking the cue given him by Mr. Pontifex; "it's no use trying to fight you with this terrible likeness playing into your hands. All I ask is that you will let me go abroad. I can't live and die shut up here."

"Ah!" retorted his brother, cheerfully; "I thought you'd appreciate the situation sooner or later. You're right, Allan, my boy, I am one too many for you, with Doctor Pat to swear—at a price—that you're as mad as a hatter, and Murie Wakeford getting ready to marry me, as the real Allan Temple, in a month."

Allan groaned theatrically, but held his tongue. He had no desire to check the revelations which were being made before the hidden witnesses.

"I won't be hard on you," pursued his brother tolerantly; "a week after I'm married you shall be shipped off to Canada, with five hundred pounds in your pouch and two hundred a year as long as you're good. For the present, you're safer up here, though I'm glad you've decided to be sensible. Ta-ta!"

He rose to go, but found himself seized in a grip of steel. Mr. Pontifex had caught him round the neck from behind, and, holding him in a strangling clutch, was issuing low commands with military brevity and precision. In the twinkling of an eye Albert Temple was gagged, deprived of his life-protector, and bound in a chair.

From a natty case the lawyer fished out his pair of pocket-scissors, and dexterously snipped off the moustache of the writhing Albert—that moustache by whose aid he had been able to masquerade as Muriel Wakeford's betrothed. Then, carrying him into Allan's bedroom, the lawyer and the pretended lunatic stripped the plotter of his evening attire. This Allan substituted for his own lounge-suit, the latter being forced upon the struggling limbs of Albert Temple. The transformation completed, Albert was unbound, relieved of his gag, and deposited on the bed. Mr. Pontifex, putting away his scissors, delivered a pithy explanation.

"My dear sir," he said, "you are now Albert Temple again, and, thanks to your own machinations, that person is supposed to be as mad as a hatter. Ultimately, no doubt, we shall allow you to be cured, and sent abroad to Canada. But, for the present, you are safer up here. Your brother will be too busy with his approaching marriage to be responsible for you."

He drew up the table, lifted a chair on it, and aided Muriel Wakeford to mount to the open skylight, before Albert Temple's incredulous gaze. The lawyer followed her, after seeing the other twin-brother safely out of the garret.

"If Mr. Allan Temple chooses to call at Portman Square, to-night," he remarked, just before the door at the top of the stairs was closed by the man he had so cleverly rescued, "Miss Wakeford will probably be at home. As for myself, I will only say *au revoir*."

He replaced the furniture once more in its customary position, and, keeping a vigilant watch on the sullen Albert, swung himself up again to the roof. Having screwed down the bars with deliberate skill, he led his pretty client back to her wondering maid and the open skylight of Number Ten. In his pocket—as a memento—he carried the life-protector.

* * * * *

Mr. Pontifex's prophecy proved true. For a month Albert Temple was held under lock and key. Not until the Temple-Wakeford marriage was a week old did he descend from the floor with the barred windows. And then it was upon the certificate of the rascally little Irish doctor, with whom he had plotted to defraud his brother of wife and fortune. But "Doctor Pat"—being generously treated by Mr. Pontifex—kept his own counsel, and gravely congratulated his "patient" on a "surprising recovery."

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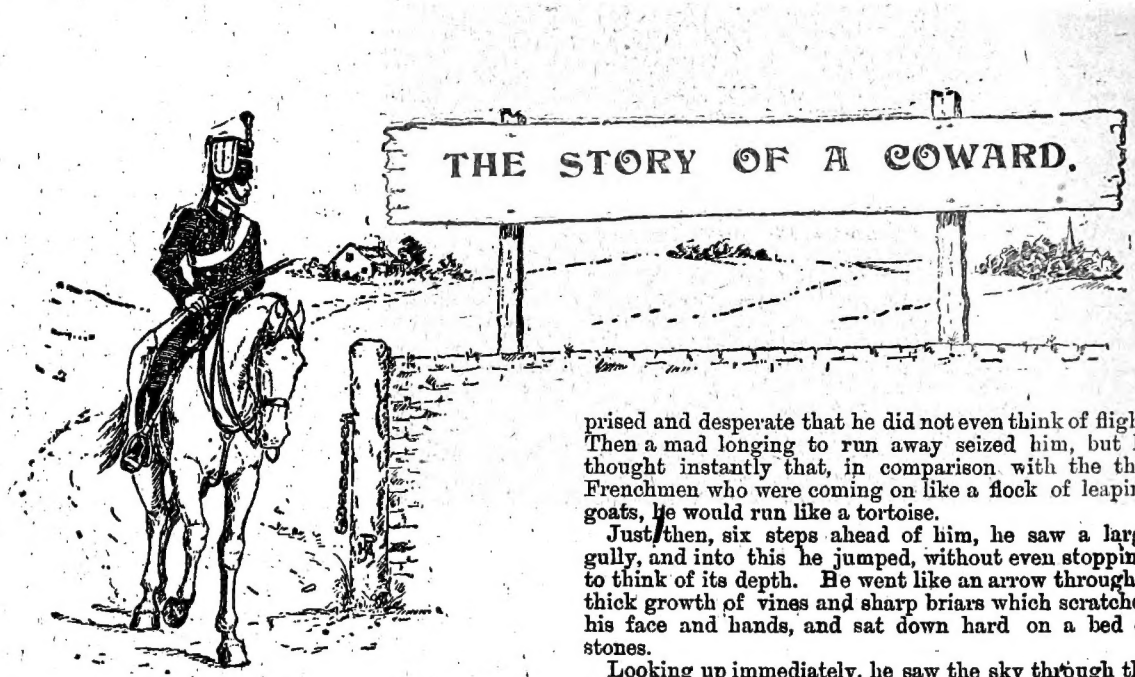

EVER since he entered France with the invading German army, Walter Schnaffs had considered himself the unhappiest of men. He was stout, walked with difficulty, puffed a good deal, and suffered much from his feet, which were flat and very fat. He was, besides, of a peaceful and kind disposition, not at all heroic or warlike, father of four children, whom he adored, and husband of a fair young wife, whose kisses and caresses and thoughtful care he missed sadly every day. He liked to go to bed early and get up late, to eat good things at his ease, and to drink beer. He believed, moreover, that everything worth having ended with life, and he cherished in his heart a deep hatred, which was both instinctive and rational, for cannon, rifles, revolvers, and swords, and, above all, for bayonets, for he felt that he was not able to wield that weapon quickly enough to defend his large body.

And when at nightfall he went to bed on the ground, rolled up in his cloak beside his snoring comrades, he thought for a long time of those he had left behind, and of the dangers which surrounded his path. If he should be killed, what would become of his little ones? Who would feed them and bring them up?

And sometimes Walter Schnaffs wept. At the beginning of each battle his legs felt so weak that he would have fallen if he had not feared that the whole army would pass over his body. The whistling of the balls made his hair stand on end. And so for months he lived in a state of fear and anguish.

The main body of the troops was advancing towards Normandy, and one day he was sent to reconnoitre with a small detachment which was simply to explore a part of the neigbbourhood and then fall back again. Everything seemed quiet in that district, and nothing indicated an organised resistance, but just as the Prussians were calmly entering a little valley, crossed occasionally by deep gullies, a brisk firing brought them to a standstill, cutting down a score of their number, and a body of sharpshooters, rushing out from a handful of trees, charged them with bayonets fixed.

Walter Schnaffs at first remained motionless, so surprised and desperate that he did not even think of flight. Then a mad longing to run away seized him, but he thought instantly that, in comparison with the thin Frenchmen who were coming on like a flock of leaping goats, he would run like a tortoise.

Just then, six steps ahead of him, he saw a large gully, and into this he jumped, without even stopping to think of its depth. He went like an arrow through a thick growth of vines and sharp briars which scratched his face and hands, and sat down hard on a bed of stones.

Looking up immediately, he saw the sky through the hole which he had made. That tell-tale hole would betray him, and he crawled along on his hands and feet, at the bottom of the ditch, under the roof made by the interlacing branches, going as fast as he could away from the fighting. After a while he stopped and sat down again, squatting like a hare in the tall, dry grass.

For some time he still heard the shots, cries, and moans. Then the sounds of the struggle grew fainter and ceased. All was calm and quiet again. Suddenly something stirred close by him and gave him a frightful start. It was a little bird which had perched on a branch, and rustled the dead leaves.

For nearly an hour Walter Schnaffs' heart beat with great bounds. The night was coming on, filling the gully with shadows, and the soldier began to reflect. What would become of him? What should he do? Must he begin again that horrible life of anguish, terror, fatigue, and suffering which he had led since the beginning of the war? No, he no longer had the courage and the energy necessary to bear the marches and face the incessant dangers.

But what could he do? He could not stay in this ditch and conceal himself until the war was over. No, indeed! If he had not been obliged to eat, that prospect would not have disturbed him; but he *was* obliged to eat—to eat every day.

Suddenly he thought, "If I were only a prisoner!" and he was filled with a sudden, violent longing to become a prisoner. A prisoner! He would be saved, fed, lodged, sheltered from shots and sabres, without any further apprehension, in a comfortable, well-guarded prison? What a glorious dream! And he immediately decided to make himself a prisoner. He got up, resolved to carry out his plan without a moment's delay.

But suddenly he stopped motionless, assailed by disagreeable thoughts and new terrors. Where was he to go to make himself a prisoner? In which direction, and how? And frightful pictures of death rushed into his mind. He would run great risks in venturing alone about the country in his spiked helmet. What if he

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should meet some peasants? As soon as they saw a wandering, defenceless Prussian, they would murder him with their pitchforks, their pickaxes, their scythes, their shovels! They would reduce him to a pulp in their rage at their country's defeat. What if he should meet sharpshooters? They would shoot him as soon as they saw him to amuse themselves, to pass away the time, for the fun of the thing.

And he fancied himself already standing against the wall, opposite to a dozen gun-barrels, whose little, black, round holes seemed to be looking at him. And if he should meet the French army itself! The vanguard would take him for a scout, for some bold and crafty soldier reconnoitering alone, and they would shoot him down. And he heard already the irregular firing of the soldiers, hidden in a thicket, while he, standing in the middle of the field, sank down, riddled like a sieve, by the balls which he could feel entering his flesh.

He sat down again in desperation. His situation seemed hopeless to him. Night had by this time quite settled down—dumb, black night. He did not move, but trembled at every slight and unknown sound which was heard in the darkness. A rabbit stealing through the leaves nearly put him to flight. The hooting of the owls tore his soul with sudden fears, as painful as wounds. He strained his large eyes to try to pierce the gloom, and every moment he thought he heard a footstep near him.

Into this he jumped.

After endless hours of torture he saw the sky growing light through his roof underbrush. At that a great relief filled him. His muscles relaxed, and he stretched himself with a lightened heart. His eyes closed, and he slept.

When he awoke, the sun seemed to be almost overhead; it must be noon. No noise broke the dull quiet of the fields, and Walter Schnaffs discovered that he was seized with sharp hunger. He rose, walked a few steps, found that his legs were weak, and sat down again to think. For two or three hours he weighed the pros and cons, changing his mind every minute hesitating, unhappy, and distracted by the most conflicting emotions.

One idea seemed to him sufficiently practical: It was to watch until some unarmed villager should pass by, one who had no dangerous farming tools with him, and then to run out and put himself in his hands, making him understand that he surrendered himself. Then he took off his helmet, the spike of which was likely to betray him, and thrust his head out of his hole with infinite precaution. Not a soul was to be seen. Yonder, at the right, the smoke rose towards the sky from the roofs of a little village—smoke from the kitchen fires. At the left he saw, at the end of an avenue of trees, a large house. He waited thus until evening, suffering frightfully, seeing nothing but flocks of crows. And once more night fell around him. He stretched himself at the bottom of his retreat, and slept an uneasy sleep, haunted by nightmares, the sleep of a famished man.

Dawn broke again over his head. Once more he took up his post of observation. But the country was as deserted as it had been the night before, and a new fear possessed him—the fear of dying of hunger! He saw himself stretched at the bottom of his hole, flat on his back, with eyes closed.

This thought nearly maddened him, for he would be overcome with weakness and unable to walk. And he was quite determined to hurry to the village, to dare all, to brave all, when he saw three peasants coming towards the fields with their pitchforks on their shoulders, and he drew back into his hiding-place.

But, as soon as the evening darkened the plain, he crawled slowly out of the ditch, and started off towards the large house, preferring to go there rather than to the village, which seemed as formidable to him as a den of tigers. The lower windows were lighted up. One of them was open, and a strong odour of roast meat came from it, an odour which, rushing through the nostrils of Walter Schnaffs, made him impatient, made him pant for breath, drew him irresistibly forward, and filled his heart with desperate courage.

Suddenly, without stopping to think, he appeared with his helmet on in the open window. Eight servants were seated at dinner round a large table. All at once a nurse stopped, open-mouthed, dropping her glass, and stared fixedly ahead of her. All eyes followed hers.

They saw the enemy! Heavens! The Prussians were attacking the house!

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There was at once a cry, composed of eight screams uttered together by different voices, a cry of frightful terror, then a confused rising, and a stampede to the door at the back of the room. Chairs were knocked down, the men upset the women and rushed over them, and in two seconds the room was empty, abandoned, with the table covered with food standing before the astonished Walter Schnaffs, who was still at the window.

After an instant of hesitation he climbed in and went towards the table. His great hunger made him as weak as a man in a fever, but he was still paralyzed by terror. He listened.

"You are my prisoner! Surrender!"

The whole house was in a tumult; doors were slamming, and rapid footsteps were heard overhead. The uneasy Prussian listened to these noises, and heard dull sounds as if bodies were falling into the soft earth at the foot of the walls, human beings who had leapt from the storey above. Then all movement, all the commotion, stopped, and the great house became as silent as a tomb.

Schnaffs seated himself before a full plate and began to eat. He ate in large mouthfuls, as if he were afraid of being interrupted too soon, before he had had enough. He emptied all the plates, all the dishes, all the bottles; then, satisfied with eating and drinking, stupefied, flushed, his mind uneasy and his tongue thick, he unbuttoned his uniform to breathe more easily, incapable of taking a step. His eyes closed, his thoughts grew confused, he leant his heavy head on his arms folded on the table, and soon lost all idea of persons and things.

The quiet house raised its great black silhouette against the sky. Two windows only on the ground-floor were lighted. Suddenly a voice of thunder shouted, "Forward! To the assault, comrades!" And in an instant the doors, the shutters, the windows gave way before the flood of men who dashed forward, burst open, broke down everything, and invaded the house.

Instantly fifty soldiers, armed to the teeth, rushed into the kitchen where Walter Schnaffs was sleeping peacefully, and placed against his body fifty loaded rifles, knocked him down, rolled him over, seized him and bound him from head to foot.

A large soldier, much bedecked with gold, planted his foot on his stomach, crying out:

"You are my prisoner! Surrender!"

The Prussian heard only the one word "prisoner," and he groaned, "Ya, ya, ya!"

He was lifted up, bound to a chair, and examined with lively curiosity by his captors, who were blowing like whales. Several of them sat down, overcome by emotion and fatigue. He could smile now, sure of being a prisoner at last. Another officer came in and announced:

"Colonel, the enemy has fled; several seem to have been wounded. We are masters of the place."

The large officer wiped his forehead and cried "Victory!" and he wrote in a little memorandum-book which he took out of his pocket:

"After a desperate struggle the Prussians were put to flight, carrying with them their dead and wounded, estimated at fifty. Several of them remain in our possession."

"What orders shall I give?" said the young officer.

"We are going to fall back to avoid a renewed attack with artillery and superior force," answered the colonel, and he gave the order to retire.

At daybreak they reached the prefecture of La Roche-Oysel, whose National Guard had accomplished this feat of arms. The anxious and much-excited townspeople were expecting them. When the prisoner's helmet was seen loud outcries were raised. The women held up their hands, the old ones wept, and an old man threw his crutch at the Prussian, and wounded one of his guards on the nose. The colonel shouted, "Keep the prisoner safe!"

They came at last to the Town Hall. The prison was opened, and Walter Schnaffs, freed from his bonds, was put in it. Two hundred armed men mounted guard round the building. Then, in spite of the symptoms of indigestion which tormented him, the Prussian, wild with joy, began to dance madly about, waving his arms and legs, and laughing crazily, until he fell in a heap, quite exhausted.

He was a prisoner. Saved!

Colonel Rotier, cloth merchant, who managed the affair at the head of the National Guard of La Roche-Oysel, was decorated.

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THE LION'S WARS

The Two Great Sikh Wars of 1844-1847, 1848-1851.

SOME illusions die hard. On the continent the belief exists to this day that our conquest of India was achieved by marching regiments of Indian soldiers, commanded by British officers, against any native Prince who had, unfortunately for himself, incurred our displeasure, our procedure being to defeat his troops, seize his person, grant him a pension, and annex his dominions.

By this time it must be clear to the reader, that so far from this being the case the wars we have waged with India were forced on us by the ceaseless efforts of the feudatory Princes, whose states we guaranteed against invasion, to drive us out of India.

Once engulfed in a policy of conquest we had to fight our way steadfastly and courageously, foot by foot, till the entire Peninsula acknowledged our sway.

Long before the Sikhs war broke out, our Indian statesmen saw that peace would never be assured till the frontier tribes of the west, and north-west, had been brought under the wing of our motley Empire.

So no sooner had we rescued the inhabitants of Scinde from the grip of the savage Beluchis than we turned our attention to the Punjaub, inhabited by the warlike Sikhs.

We first hear of the Sikhs in the XVI. century. A brave and robust race had migrated to the Punjaub and had become one of the most powerful nations on the frontier of India.

The French, ever our enemies, forseeing that the warlike temperament of the people would sooner or later bring us into conflict with them, secretly introduced into the country, shortly after their defeat at Waterloo, a number of officers who trained the Sikh troops to such a pitch of efficiency, that it was thought by competent judges that they would prove more than a match for the British.

During the life of Runjeet Singh the Lion of the Punjaub (a man of great talent although of poor education) the chieftains had been kept in rigid subjection. A man of indomi able will, he consolidated a number of small estates into one vast kingdom, ruling it with a rod of iron. But the breath was no sooner out of his body than the country fell into a state of anarchy. His eldest son was slain in a brawl, his wife and infant child fled, whilst the army which for years had been pining for conflict, demanded to be led against the British.

The authorities at Calcutta, knowing that the long smouldering hatred of the Sikhs for us would burst into flame, had on the death of Runjeet Singh quietly massed 30,000 men and ninety guns to a camp lying between Meerut and Loodiana under the command of General Sir H. Gough.

One of the first acts of the Sikh army was to insist that General Pollock and his "Army of Retribution," which was to punish the Afghans, and bring away the beleaguered garrisons, should be refused a passage through the Punjaub.

This being declined they insisted on being allowed to raid the convoys and cut the communication. As Sheer Singh, the successor of Runjeet Singh, refused to

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sanction these proceedings, Ajeet Singh, his brother-in-law, with the connivance of the soldiery, murdered him.

Ajeet then, in order to render his rule supreme, proceeded to murder the rest of the royal family.

Unfortunately for his plans two escaped—Djehan Singh and Heerah Singh.

These worthies, after capturing the murderer, handed him to the mob who literally tore him in pieces. After this, murd r and debauchery of every kind marched hand in hand through the Punjaub.

When the pleasures of murdering each other began to pall, the Sikh chiefs began to mass their forces in the neighbourhood of Lahore, their capital.

The mother of Maharajan Dhuleep Singh (a mere boy who now succeeded to the throne), fearing for her own and her son's life, then circulated a report that the British Army, which had been increased to 40,000 men, was intended for the conquest of the Punjaub, besides throwing out hints as to the value of the treasures stored in Agra, Delhi, and Benares. Their cupidity thus roused, the Sikhs at once crossed the Sutlej. The two chiefs who led the Sikhs might easily have crushed the small force stationed on the river bank under Sir John Littler, but a timely bribe from one of the East India Company's secret agents induced them to grant a truce of one week to enable us to retire. This gave time for Sir H. Gough, by means of a forced march of 150 miles in six days under a burning sun, to appear on the scene.

Bitterly repenting of their folly, Lah Singh and Tib Singh attempted to bar Gough's passage with a force of 10,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry. In the hand to hand struggle which followed the British saw that at last they had met foemen worthy of their steel. After a sanguinary engagement lasting six hours they succeeded in driving the enemy back, but their losses were dreadfully heavy considering the smallness of the attacking force. In this skirmish, as it was called, our casualties were 215 killed, and 607 wounded. A few days later the two British forces effected a junction at Ferozeshuhur.

Having rested his troops, Sir H. Gough, undismayed by the numerical superiority of the foe, which was so great that their front exceeded a mile in extent, resolved to attack. For some reason or other, however, the assault was delayed till the day was far spent, and, to still further cloud the issue, Gough hurled his men at the enemy's position without stopping to think what the enemy would do.

Gough was one of those generals which have always been plentiful in the British Army. Of strategy he had not the slightest notion. His plan was to point to the enemy, shout in a loud voice: "there they are, my lads, and now let us give it them hot," and then placing himself at their head, rush headlong to the attack.

Gough took charge of the right wing, Littler the left, whilst the Governor-General, Sir H. Hardinge, a soldier of rare ability, modestly contented himself with the centre. Gough would not hear of any other plan: his orders to Littler were, "March straight on till you get within a hundred yards and then charge and capture their guns."

Littler did draw attention to the strength of the Sikh position, but Gough rode impatiently off. Littler carried out his instructions. In the teeth of a most tremendous fire his men fought their way right up to the very mouth of the guns. There the storm of bullets worked such deadly havoc that after holding their ground for two hours the ranks became so thinned that they were compelled to retreat.

The attack of General Gough was even more vigorously conducted than that of the left, but the Sikh gunners who had been splendidly trained by the French, fought well. Their fire injured many of our guns, decimated squadrons of horse, whilst their heavy shot tore deep lanes in the ranks of our infantry.

Matters presently began to look so hopeless that Gough ordered a retreat. But his men were in no mood to listen. Heedless of the growing darkness they refused to return and marched on, getting so hopelessly entangled that officers found themselves heading companies of which they knew nothing. All discipline vanished, but there was something which took its place, a fierce determination on the part of our men to bivouac in the enemy's camp.

How they lived through the deadly concentrated fire poured on them during the last hundred yards by their well trained adversaries is not to be explained. But they somehow contrived to get inside the Sikh trenches, and once there refused to budge. This demonstrates that the science of teaching war stops short at the bayonet. The bayonet got them in and the bayonet kept them there. Having cleared all the enemy out, the troops, now thoroughly exhausted, went to sleep beside the dead bodies of their victims although their position was one of great danger, the main body of the Sikhs being only a short distance off.

At another part of the field the position was equally critical. Sir Harry Smith, who subsequently defeated the Boers at the battle of Boomplats in the Orange Free State, by dint of severe fighting had actually fought his way into the heart of the Sikh position. Followed by a body of our wonderful infantry, Sir Harry even obtained possession of the village of Ferozeshuhur and would have made good his position had supports been sent up. These not being forthcoming, this same matchless infantry seeing they were surrounded, cut their way out, but retreat further than two miles they would not.

Sir Henry Hardinge was more successful. In spite of a most destructive fire, his men fought their way right up to the edge of the Sikh position, intrenched and held their ground despite all efforts to dislodge them. The night was bitterly cold, the men in all parts of the field were without food or covering, but no one murmured, for they all knew that next morning they would either have to defeat the enemy or die dishonourably on the field. During the night the Govenor-General went among the soldiers, told them that the losses had been tremendous, and offered to retreat to Ferozepur, but they all repudiated the idea with disdain. It was well they did, for in the night a serious quarrel broke out in the Sikh camp.

The soldiers having demanded their pay, which was greatly in arrears, it was declared that the military chest had been rifled. The two chiefs, Lal Singh and Tib Singh, were both accused of the theft and recriminations were fast ripening the quarrel into a fight when the British appeared.

The temper of our men was shown at the commencement of the battle. A powerful gun had been run forward over a mile to check our central advance. Although it was protected by 5,000 of the Sikh crack shots, the brave 80th made a dash for the gun and despite all the efforts of the Sikhs, carried it off.

In the meantime, Sir Henry Hardinge on the left, and Sir Hugh Gough on the right, marched on, despite

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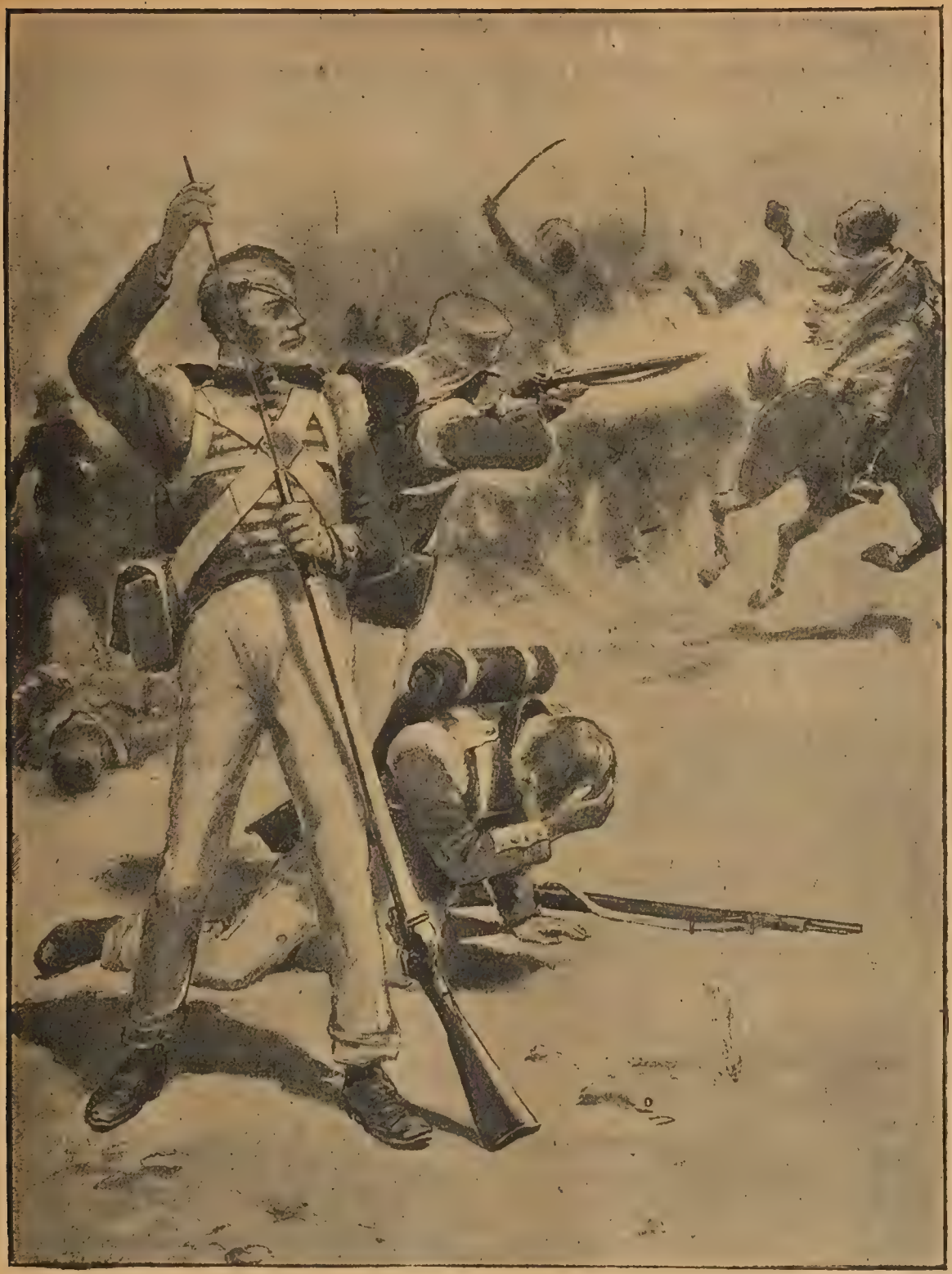

Drawn by] **The Sikhs rode into our disorganised ranks.** *[Lawson Wood.*

Google

volleys of musketry, till the Sikh lines were reached. Then they made straight for Ferozeshuhur, the carrying of which—for five assaults on it were repulsed—entailed a fearful loss of life. So soon as the village was taken the two wings changed front and swept the whole of the Sikh position from end to end like a hurricane.

Still victory hung in the balance. Our men were beginning to think about dinner, when Tib Singh and 20,000 splendid Sikhs and seventy guns, came in sight. Dismayed at finding the village in our hands, and little dreaming that the troops were quite worn out, they contented themselves with a distant bombardment and retired. Had they attacked, nothing could have saved our Army from total destruction. Our losses in this battle were terrible, the number being nearly 3,000, of whom 1,721 were killed outright. We killed 2,000 Sikhs and wounded 6,000 more, besides capturing seventy-three guns.

Although we had captured seventy-three guns, the Sikhs withdrew so slowly across the Sutlej, that it soon came to be believed that the battle could hardly be called a victory for our arms. A fresh campaign was therefore undertaken in order that the honour and prestige of Britain might be thoroughly vindicated. But the time spent in collecting supplies was so great that the Sikhs, misunderstanding the cause, again at the end of January, 1846, crossed the Sutlej and advanced against the important station of Loodiana. In order to prevent the Sikhs attacking a valuable convoy from Delhi, Sir Harry Smith moved to Aliwal, and at once came into contact with the Sikh army, 15,000 strong, under Runjur Singh. Our general had only 11,000 men, but having the instincts of a true soldier he turned the enemy's position, throwing them by this manœuvre into such confusion that with the aid of the bayonet he was able to storm the village of Aliwal. This reverse so discouraged the Sikh chiefs that they opened secret negotiations for peace with Calcutta.

Our terms were that the Sikh force should be disbanded, but as the Sikh leaders were not powerful enough to effect this, the Army being omnipotent in the Punjaub, they sent an emissary to Calcutta proposing that the Sikh army should be attacked unawares and that after the battle our troops should march straight to Lahore where no resistance should be offered.

During these negotiations the Sikhs, 40,000 in number, occupied a strongly-intrenched camp on both sides of the Sutlej, connection being established by a bridge of boats near the village of Sobraon. The Sikhs having regained their old confidence were anxious to try conclusions with us, and their ardour was inflamed by an old warrior, Shen Singh, who to propitiate the god of battle declared he would offer his life as a sacrifice in the next engagement.

The desire to recommence hostilities was just as keen in the British camp. Reinforcements in addition to powerful ordnance arrived in such numbers that on the morning of the battle of Sobraon, Feb. 10th, 1846, our force had increased to 15,000 men, of whom quite 5,000 were British.

So soon as it was observed that the Sikhs had planted their artillery in a fort built in the centre it was resolved to make the attack on both flanks, break through, and if possible capture the guns. Nothing can be urged against this plan, but when it was further resolved that as the enemy's right was weak its destruction would be assured were it assailed by General Dick, who was at the head of our strongest division, a grievous blunder was committed.

It is true we might be able to crush the Sikh right, but would an attack by our weak right be able to succeed against the Sikh strong left? Doubtful. In fact it was only the courage of the British soldier which saved the day.

A fog at daybreak enabled us to approach within striking distance of the left. When it dispersed the two armies were close together.

The Sikhs, quite undismayed, met our rushes in the most heroic manner.

Our right after a most sanguinary fight managed to break through the enemy's lines, but the pressure of numbers soon so huddled them together, that they would have been annihilated had not the officers broken through the throng, and calling on their men to follow them made for the centre.

With a loud hurrah our red coats crossed a ditch, and before the gunners could realise what was taking place, had scaled some ramparts, and bayoneted every gunner in the central fort.

Victory on the left and centre would have come much sooner after the capture of the centre fort had not Shen Singh roused the fanaticism of the Sikhs to fever heat by galloping, clothed in the white robes of martyrdom, right into the middle of the British left.

In an instant 10,000 Sikh soldiers were at his heels and a fight ensued which for sheer ferocity has probably never been equalled in history.

Whilst the issue was still undecided the treacherous Tib Singh, having destroyed the centre boats of the bridge, ordered a retreat.

So few heeded the order that the betrayal of his countrymen might have been averted had the Sikhs been fighting any other soldiers but British. As it was, the stern unbending courage of our men triumphed over the fiery valour of the Sikhs.

After being driven to the river brink the Sikhs, owing to the bridge being broken, had to still fight on.

The orders being that their army was to be thoroughly dispersed the batteries were brought up and such a torrent of shot and shell poured into the defeated foe that next day over 7,000 dead bodies were counted. Their total loss is said to have exceeded 12,000. Our own too was sadly heavy, 320 being killed and 2,083 wounded.

We then crossed the Sutlej without opposition and invaded the Punjaub. On February 12th we captured the town and fortress of Kussoor, and on the 20th, reached Lahore.

By the peace which followed, the boundary of the Punjaub was pushed back from the Sutlej to the Beas and the army disbanded, save about 20,000 Sikhs to act as police.

But the peace was of short duration. In 1848 Mr. Vane Agnew and Lieutenant Anderson, our representatives, were murdered. Owing to Sir H., now Lord, Gough, not caring to move the troops in mid-winter time was given for a rebellion to be organised.

In August General Whish and 7,000 men were dispatched to recapture Mooltan, but owing to the treachery of Shen Singh, our General was compelled to intrench and await reinforcements.

This misfortune led to the rising becoming general. Lord Gough at once went to the front. Advancing with all his impetuosity, he attempted to drive Shen Singh across the river. Had he waited for his artillery he might have succeeded.

As it was the Sikh artillery on the opposite side of

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the river so effectually checked his progress that he resolved to try and effect their capture.

This was a prudent resolve, but so much time was wasted in marching up stream to find a ford, that Shen Singh was able to remove his army to the Jhelum where he fortified his position with such skill that several weeks elapsed before we were ready to attack it.

On January 14th, 1846, Gough advanced against the Sikhs, coming in touch with them at Chillianwallah. The foe had taken up, as we have said, a splendid defensive position and fortified it after the best European methods.

The dangers of a frontal attack were so evident even to General Gough, that he determined on a reconnaisance in force (a most unusual movement with him) previous to attacking. Before it could be carried out his old impetuosity reasserted itself. The insolence of the Sikh gunners so annoyed him that although it was within two hours of nightfall, he gave orders for an immediate advance.

On receiving the word our men as usual rushed headlong at the guns. But the Sikh artillery, in addition to occupying an almost unassailable position, was so numerous and so well served that long before we reached them our men began to drop by scores. Still they persevered, but when over seventy of their guns got our range the ranks thinned at such an alarming rate that the survivors, to avoid extermination, beat a hasty retreat.

The native soldiers, unused to such a sight, became panic-stricken, seeing which the Sikhs swooped down on us with inconceivable fury. The 24th were cut to pieces besides losing their colours, and the native troops driven pell-mell off the field. The handful of British still left fought with the most stubborn bravery, hurling back charge after charge of the Sikh horsemen. But as the reserves sent by Lord Gough, owing to their having lost their way in the jungle, failed to reach the little band on whose efforts the fortunes of the day depended, defeat seemed certain.

The result was trembling in the balance, another instant and it would be all over, when General Campbell, who before the battle had marched his men round the enemy's rear, appeared on the scene. Grasping the situation, the General ordered his men to get to work with the bayonet.

Baulked of their prey, the maddened Sikhs refused to retreat before the dreaded steel, pressing our men so hard that it was doubtful whether the day would have been saved, had not the cavalry who had been told off to guard the ammunition and wings, been sent into action towards the close. The 9th Lancers and the 14th Dragoons drove into the solid mass of Sikh infantry, hacking and hewing at them till even these dauntless warriors were compelled to fly.

Then disaster again threatened us. An undiscovered traitor called out as the Sikh horse galloped towards us: "Threes about." Some of our fellows obeyed and retreated, others did not. Still, the whole regiment was thus thrown into such confusion, that the Sikhs, seeing that a good opportunity was come, and burning to retrieve their losses, rode into our disorganised ranks cutting us down right and left, besides capturing five guns.

In other parts of the field we were more successful. Yet it must be confessed that, although we held the ground during the night, Chillianwallah cannot be reckoned a British victory.

We lost over 2,000 men, the Sikhs probably more. We captured twelve guns and lost five. In Britain, the battle was regarded as a defeat. Lord Gough was recalled and Sir C. Napier sent out to break the power of the Sikhs for good. But the Fates had relented. Before Napier landed Lord Gough had fought and won the battle of Guzerat, Feb. 21st, 1849, and the Punjaub was annexed.

In this last battle we thoroughly re-established our supremacy. After breaking up the Sikh army, we chased it across the country for miles.

The Sikhs now fight on our side. If Russia ever invades India she will find the Sikh soldier an awkward antagonist.

(*Next week*: **The Wars in Ashanti.**)

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A good thing . . . .
If you can't get . . . .
That good thing . . . .
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SHORT STORIES THAT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "Guilty Gold," by Headon Hill, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, March 18th. Post-cards only, please.

The Prize of One Guinea for the best Storyette has been won this week by Mr. R. A. H. Goodyear, of Tune Street, Barnsley, Yorks, for the Storyette entitled "Elucidated."

Elucidated.

THE first question the bishop put to the children was, "Can any of you bairns tell me what average is?"

This, apparently, was too easy, for hands shot up along every desk in the class-room, importuning his notice.

"I'll let you tell me, my little man," said the bishop, patting the curly head of the schoolmaster's son, who had been artfully placed in the front row.

"Please, my lord, average is what a hen lays eggs on," was the startling answer.

Sorely did this definition puzzle his lordship, and he was constrained to ask the boy for further enlightenment.

"Well, sir," explained the boy, "I don't quite understand it myself, but when people ask mother how many eggs her hens lay, she always says, 'twenty a day on an average.'"

R. A. H. G.

A Parting Shot.

IT was in an American railway car, a fierce battle raged between a male and female. He was smoking where smoking was "strictly prohibited."

She objected on principle, and because she loathed the "horrid weed."

There was no lack of ammunition and the attack threatened to last through the long journey, till the woman, ever hoping to have the last word, shrieked:

"If you were my husband I would put poison in your coffee."

"And," replied the man, "if you were my wife, I would gladly drink it."

With this cruel and victorious shot he left the car, feeling that he had won the day!

J. G. B.

Sensational.

A REPORTER for the NEWS was taken on trial.

He went hunting for items and returned in the evening with a sensational report:

"This morning I saw a sight that froze my blood with horror. A cabman driving down the street at a rapid pace nearly ran over a nurse with a baby. There would have been a most heartrending catastrophe had not the nurse with wonderful forethought left the child at home before she came out and providently stepped into a milliner's shop just before the cab passed. The cabman, too, just before the crossing, thought of something he had forgotten, and, turning round, drove back. Had it not been for this wonderful forethought of both, a doting father, a loving mother, and affectionate brothers and sisters, would have been plunged into the deepest sorrow."

The reporter will be kept on.

G. D.

She Spoilt the Scene.

THE Amateur Thespians were giving a performance of *The Lady of Lyons*, and the village institute was packed to its utmost capacity with an indulgent and none too critical audience.

All went well until the scene was reached where Claude Melnotte, masquerading as a prince, proposes to Pauline, and begins to describe his imaginary palace on the Lake of Como. He had no sooner started the well-known lines, however, when an old woman jumped up from her seat, and addressing herself to the young lady who was sustaining the title *rôle* she shouted out:

"Dunnot thee believe him, wench, for he's telling thee nowt but a pack o' lies. He's noather a prince, nor has he a palace. Aw'll tell thee what he is: he's a weaver down at Brookside factory, an' it's a rare week for him when he draws fifteen shillin'!"

Then she sat down, but it took the audience some time to stifle their merriment, and it is needless to add that the scene was entirely spoilt.

A. V.

Willing to be Knocked Down Again.

A CIVIL word is the cheapest thing in the world, and if spoken at the proper time is often a solace to a weary heart. I was abruptly turning a corner the other day when I ran against a boy who was ragged, small and freckled. Stopping, I turned to him and said:

"I beg your pardon; indeed, I am sorry."

The boy looked up in blank amazement for an instant, then, taking off about three-fourths of a cap, bowed very low, smiled until his face was beaming, and answered:

"You kin hev my parding and welcome, miss; and yer may run ag'in me and knock me clean down an' I won't say a word."

As I was passing away he turned to a comrade and said, half-apologetically:

"I never had anyone ask my parding an' it kind o' took me off my feet."

MISS S.

Breaking It Gently.

Two soft, white arms go stealing around his neck, and a fair, peach-like cheek is rubbed carelessly against his own.

Faintly whispered, "Dear papa," and "Darling old boy," and "Don't you love your sweet?" reach his startled ears as he vainly attempts to pull himself together and avoid the loving, sugar-coated attack which he well knows is coming.

"Well, daughter mine," he finally asks, "what is it? Not another new dress, surely?"

"Oh, no, papa darling."

"H-m-m, that's good. And it can't be the milliner again?"

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"No, papa, love."

"H-m-m, better still. It isn't the florist?"

"No, you dearest papa."

"H-m-m, great Scott! You don't want a trip to Italy, do you?"

"No, you lovely old dear."

"Well, what in the name of goodness do you want, my little girl?"

"Darling papa mine, I don't want anything—ah, that is—Jack wants me."

A. P.

Bill and the Ghost.

THE topic of conversation in a certain country inn one evening turned to ghosts, and, of course, the local ghost came under consideration.

Old Bill declared he did not believe in ghosts at all, The result was all the company said he dare not go through the wood at midnight.

He took the bet and the condition was, that he took a certain article and placed it against the gate on the other side of the wood.

Arming himself with a heavy stick he set forth on his hazardous journey.

In the middle of the wood a weird white object with horns appeared, and slowly moving to a narrow part of the path, prevented Bill passing. Its white body presented a ghastly contrast to the dark wood.

"Let me pass," called Bill.

No response.

"Let me pass or you will feel this stick."

No response. Thud went the stick right between the horns. The ghost fell and Bill passed on.

He deposited the article and returned.

"Did you see anything, Bill?" they all shouted in chorus.

"Yes, but I hit him between the horns and he shifted."

Two or three of the company rushed through the wood and there, groaning in a semi-conscious condition with a pair of bullock's horns fastened on his head and a sheet drawn over so that the horns appeared through the sheet, lay the man who originated the plot to frighten old Bill.

J. S.

Not Her Laddie.

A GENTLEMAN on a walk from one of the suburbs of Glasgow happened to call at a farmhouse, where he was readily supplied with a glass of milk.

He offered the lady sixpence, but she declined all payment.

"I couldn't take money for 't," she said, in her own proud way.

The gentleman expressed his acknowledgment and went on his way, but at the garden gate he detected a small boy playing.

Surely, he thought, this is the lady's son. So he put his hand in his pocket to give him the sixpence, when he heard a shrill voice:

"That's no ma laddie, sir."

Then there was a pause, and the voice afterwards resounded, this time directed to a small boy at the side door.

"Gang oot, Willie, an' speak till the nice gentleman at the gate."

G. E. G.

The Reason Why.

A SCHOOLMASTER in a village school had been in the habit of purchasing pork from parents of his pupils on the occasion of the killing of a pig.

One day a small boy marched up to the master's desk and inquired if he would like a bit of pork, as they were going to kill their pig.

The schoolmaster replied in the affirmative.

Several days elapsed, and, hearing nothing of the pork, the master called the boy up to him, and inquired the reason he had not brought it.

"Oh, please sir," the boy replied, "the pig got better."

E. R.

She Startled Him.

"Now, Mr. B——," coldly said the handsome young widow, steadfastly watching the butcher as he weighed the sirloin she had just selected, "while I am fully conscious of the honour you wish to confer upon me, I must tell you that I have no present intention of marrying again, and I am compelled to refuse the offer of your hand."

"Bu—bu—but, ma'am," stammered the astonished butcher, "I never offered you my hand, and—er——"

"Then why are you trying to weigh it on the scales with the meat, sir?"

J. R. T.

At the Inquiry Office.

"HALLOA. Is this the gas office?"

"What is it?"

"When do the entries for the next races open?"

"We don't know anything about the races, this is the gas office."

"Just so; but I thought you could tell me."

"Why what do you want to know for?"

"Oh, nothing particular, I have a gas meter which I would like to enter, that's all!"

J. E.

"The Vag of his Tail."

A GENTLEMAN was walking with his little boy at the close of the day, and in passing the cottage of a German labourer the boy's attention was attracted to the dog. It was not a King Charles, nor a black-and-tan, but a common cur. Still, the boy took a fancy to him, and wanted "pa" to buy him. Just then the owner of the dog came home from his labours, and was met by the dog with every demonstration of dog joy. The gentleman said to the owner:

"My little boy has taken a fancy to your dog, and I will buy him. What do you ask for him?"

"I can't sell dat dog," said the German.

"Look here," said the gentleman, "that is a poor dog; but, as my boy wants him, I will give you a sovereign for him."

"Yaas," said the German, "I knows he is a werry poor dog, and he ain't worth almost nottin'; but dere ish von leetle ding mit dat dog vot I can't sell—I can't sell de vag of his tail ven I comes home ad night."

P. R.

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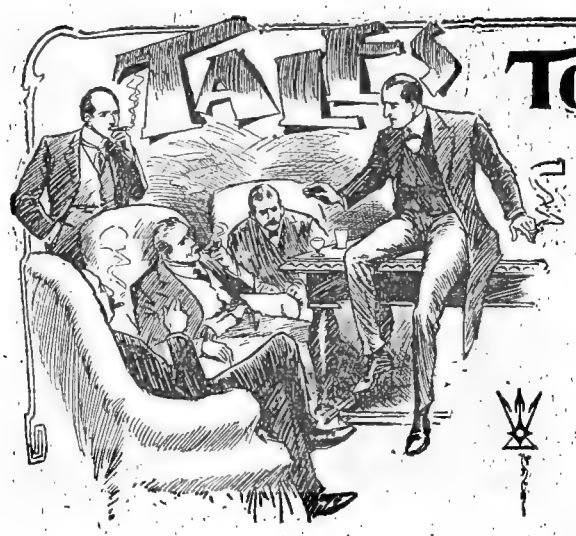

Told off Duty.

[You probably don't know the "Stand-Easy" Club. It isn't in the directory, and you might live next door to the place for years without knowing of its existence by that name. It isn't a conventional club; there is no subscription, and there is no register of members. It is merely a room in a quiet, orderly, and select hostelry in Westminster, where, by common consent, a number of officials of all kinds meet when "off duty." There you may find detectives from Scotland Yard, near by; firemen, commissionaires, a soldier or two, and maybe a doctor from St. Thomas' Hospital or elsewhere. A motley crowd they would be if they wore their uniforms, but at the "Stand-Easy" uniforms are a rarity, "mufti" being the unwritten rule. The result is a gathering of quiet, well-behaved, and well-dressed men. Saturday night is the time when one sees the biggest muster, for then it is the custom for one member to regale the company with a story, the story being, as a rule, an account of some incident in the teller's own career.]

Corporal Croft: Deserter.

Told by the COMMISSIONAIRE.

"Well, gentlemen," said the one-armed sergeant of commissionaires, as, with a dexterity born of practice, he filled and lit his pipe, "seeing that you've picked on me for yarn-duty to-night, I suppose I must obey orders. But I give you fair warning not to expect anything of the thrilling sort from your humble servant.

"It's true I saw plenty of tough fighting in the Afghan campaign of '79-80 (lost my arm there, worse luck!) but, what with the war in South Africa, I fancy most of you have had more than your fill of battle-yarns lately; so, if you've no objection, I'll try and sling you a true tale of a less-exciting sort.

"This tale begins as far back as the year 1876, and ends up as recent as the day before yesterday; it won't take long in the telling, for all that."

Having said this much, by way of preface, Commissionaire-Sergeant Pollard reflectively fingered his heavy, iron-grey moustache, lay down his pipe, and proceeded:

"When I enlisted, I reckoned I was going to be a full-blown sergeant in about six months. 'Twasn't long before I found out my mistake. The stripes take a deal of earning—a lot more than some folks appear to think; and when I discovered what a lot of smart, well-conducted chaps there were who'd been soldiering for years and got only one stripe (sometimes not that) to show for it, I came to the conclusion that I'd made a precious fool of myself in joining the Army.

"However, there I was, and there I'd got to stop. 'You've got to make the best of a bad job, Tony Pollard,' thinks I to myself. 'Promotion may be slow, but it's sure, providing you behave yourself. Only behave yourself, Tony, and you'll be a sergeant-major yet—in the far-off days to come!'

"That was how I argued the matter out with myself, gentlemen, and, sure enough, I'd only a trifle over two years' service when I was given the lance-stripe. It was a step up the ladder at any rate, though there wasn't anything extra in the shape of pay hanging to the rank.

"Some months afterwards, I appeared in 'orders' as full-corporal, and about the same time, I got struck all of a heap by a young woman whom I saw one morning walking across the barrack-square.

"I soon found out that she was Carrie Sanders, daughter of old Bob Sanders, the colour-sergeant of K company.

"It appeared that since she was a twelve-year-old girl, she had been living near London with her aunt. This aunt having died, Miss Carrie had come back to live in barracks with her old dad, who was a widower.

"'Twas a case of love at first sight with me. Such a fine, pretty wench she was, with a pert little nose and chin, and a pair of brown eyes that were full o' fun and mischief.

"The gal fairly turned my head, and, after some manœuvring, I managed to strike up an acquaintance with her. She didn't give me much encouragement, nor did her father, though I tried all I knew to get on the right side of the old colour-sergeant. However, I didn't lose hope, for if on some days Carrie would scarcely look at me, on others she would chat in a nice, confidential sort of way that made me fancy she had more than a friendly regard for me.

"Of course, had I understood the sex like I do now, I'd have known that them cold, distant airs which made me so miserable for the time being, were part of the love-making game. But I was green in those days; ignorant as a baby of woman's little artfulnesses—well, there you are!

"I hadn't made much headway in winning Carrie Sanders' affections, when I suddenly learnt that I wasn't the only chap that was after her. In fact, there was a rival in the field—a dangerous rival too, from what I could gather.

"His name was Croft, and he was, like myself, a full-corporal. But whereas I belonged to H company, he was attached to K company, which was old Bob Sanders', and though Croft wasn't at all liked by the men, it was said that his colour-sergeant thought a lot of him.

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"Now, I knew Corporal James Croft pretty well. We'd been recruits at the depôt together, and a more unsociable chap you couldn't have found anywhere. He chummed with nobody, turned up his nose at the rations, and seemed to fancy that he was altogether our superior.

"Not that he had any reason to give himself airs; for he was a dismal-looking, fishy-eyed customer, and such a wooden-headed recruit that he almost drove the drill-sergeant mad. And in spite of his stand-offish ways, Croft had no manners to speak of. He found fault with the grub, but he bolted it ravenously all the same. He was the greediest man in the whole squad, and those of us who suspected Croft of being a 'gentleman-ranker' dismissed that idea when we noticed the manner in which he wolfed his rations.

I saw her wa'king across the barrack-square.

"When our squad was drafted to the battalion, I was put into H Company, and Croft into K. He wasn't a bright soldier as I've said; but he behaved himself, and, only a few days after I'd been made 'lance,' Croft likewise got his stripe. Then I blossomed out as full-corporal, and, almost directly, Croft did the same; so we were running a neck-and-neck race for the promotion stakes, as you might say.

"Truth to tell, when I heard that Croft was sweet on Carrie Sanders, it didn't worry me much. For—though I say it that shouldn't—I was a passable-looking young fellow at one time, while Croft was what we used to call 'a bit of a slouch.' He always looked dismal—in fact, his men called him 'Dismal Jimmy,'—and, altogether, he seemed the last man in the world a lively young gal like Carrie would take a liking to.

"Howsomever, I soon found out that she did see something in him; and when I heard that he'd walked out with her three nights running, I came to the conclusion that Corporal James Croft was a more dangerous rival than I'd given him credit for being.

"I'm not going to describe in detail how things went on for the next month or two.

"You all know what the courting business is, and when I've said that one hour I walked on air, and the next was down in the deepest dumps, you'll understand my lovesick state.

"The fact was, Carrie Sanders played me and Croft off against each other, and if I hadn't been so blessed green, I should have known that I was the favoured party. But, like a fool, I let her see I was jealous, and the more I did that the more she flirted with Croft.

"So things went on, until one night, Croft stopped me and challenged me to fight for the girl. It appeared that he had popped the question to Carrie, and she had refused him.

"At that he angrily accused her of having kept him dangling at her bow in case 'that fellow Pollard' (meaning me) jilted her. Then she fired up in her turn, and told him that if he could prove himself a better man than Corporal Pollard, she'd marry him right away. All this Carrie told me long afterwards.

"I readily accepted Croft's challenge, and a few evenings afterwards we fought for Carrie Sanders in a meadow a mile or two away from barracks. The scrap lasted only three rounds—hot rounds they were too; for, if neither of us displayed much science, we managed to exchange some precious hard blows.

"It was more by luck than skill that I eventually knocked my man out with a swinger on the side of his head.

"Luckily for me, he'd put in most of his work about the ribs, and my face was practically undamaged. Croft, on the other hand, had a badly-bruised nose and a pair of black eyes; which meant a day in the hospital, followed by reduction to the ranks. And if Croft or either of our seconds split, it meant reduction for me also—and then it was all up with my chance of marrying Carrie Sanders.

"Well, me and my second started back to barracks, leaving Croft and a 'lance-jack' named Barrett, who'd

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sponged him down, to follow us when it got darker. Barrett turned up all right; Croft didn't. After walking some distance towards the barracks, Croft had remarked that if they were seen together, Barrett would probably lose his stripe for being concerned in the fight. He therefore suggested that they should take separate roads; to which Barrett agreed, and passed the sentry just before 'first post' sounded. He lived in the same room as Croft, and for half the night he lay awake wondering why the corporal didn't make his appearance.

"But never more was James Croft seen inside Burchester Barracks. He had deserted!

He started to open the letter.

"There was the usual hue and cry; but he wasn't to be found, and in due time active search for him was abandoned.

"Nobody except myself and the seconds knew about our little sparring affair, and, for our own sakes, we kept the secret well.

"As soon as I was made sergeant, old Bob Sanders agreed to my splicing his daughter. The wedding took place, and we had a happy year or so. Then came the war in Afghanistan, from which I was invalided home, minus an arm. My pension wasn't, of course, sufficient to keep a home going, so as billets for one-armed chaps wasn't plentiful, I reckoned it safest to join the Corps of Commissionaires.

"And now, in order to wind up my yarn, I must make a big jump from '81 to the day before yesterday.

"Most of you know that I'm messenger at some big offices in the City. Well, two days ago, one of the clerks hands me a letter and tells me to deliver it at once, and wait for an answer. The letter was addressed to Lord —— well, I mustn't mention names, or I might get into trouble, so we'll call him Lord Blank. I jumped on a Piccadilly 'bus, which put me down near the street in which Lord Blank lived. I soon found the house, and rang the bell. A footman was just opening the door, when up drives a pair-horse carriage, out of which steps a tip-top swell, wearing a tall hat, a fur-lined coat, and an eyeglass.

"'Here's his lordship himself,' whispers the footman to me, and, holding the letter ready, he stands waiting while the swell comes up the steps.

"'The commissionaire's just brought this, my lord, and says he is to wait for an answer,' explains the chap in livery.

"'Oh, very well,' replies my lord, and started to open the letter just inside the hall. Then he chanced to look at me, and I saw him give a bit of a start. At the same moment I gave a start, too; for in spite of the change which years had brought about, I knew him again directly, and he knew me.

"Lord Blank was no other than my old rival—Corporal Croft, the deserter!

"His lordship didn't finish opening the envelope. He quietly asked me to follow him into his library; where he sat down, read his letter carefully, scribbled a reply, and, as he handed me the note to take back to the City, remarked:

"'I see you've lost a limb since we met last, Pollard.'

"'Yes, my lord, lost it in Afghanistan,' answers I.

"'Couldn't knock me out in three rounds now, eh?' he says, without the ghost of a smile on his queer-looking phiz.

"'P'raps not, my lord; I'm a bit handicapped,' says I, looking just as solemn as himself.

"'And how was Miss Sanders when you saw her last?' he asks.

"'Mrs. Pollard was in the best of health, my lord, when I left her just after eight o'clock this morning.'

"'Ah!' says my lord, very dry, 'happy to hear it, I'm sure. Good morning, sergeant!' and he touches the bell.

"Just as the footman was shewing me out of the library, Lord Blank slips a five-pound note into my hand, and as I 'ain't a proud man, I didn't offer any objections.

"And that gentlemen," concluded the commissionaire, "about finishes my yarn. Corporal Croft, it appears, was a 'gentleman ranker' after all. I found out yesterday that the present Lord Blank succeeded to the peerage about ten years ago. At the time he enlisted, there were well-nigh a dozen lives between him and the title. His was a very poor branch of the family, and his father had married very humble.

"I gave that 'fiver' to the missus, and told her it was a tip I got from Lord Blank; bnt I didn't tell her that his lordship was an old acquaintance of hers. You see the worry of bringing up a big family on very little money, has sharpened Mrs. Pollard's tongue a bit. When she's in one of her bad-tempered fits, she's apt to be rather trying. If once Carrie learnt that she might now have been a 'my lady,' instead of a poor commissionaire's missus, I should never hear the last of it."

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FOR THE BUSH CONTINGENT.

I.

It was on a Saturday afternoon early in January, 1900. A number of men had gathered round the stock-yard at Bringenbogie Station. Three of the smartest men on Bringenbogie were about proceeding to Sydney to volunteer for the bushmen's contingent, and the owner, Mr. M'Kinnon, had given them the pick of the station horses, and was otherwise providing for each a full outfit.

They had already chosen their horses, and the fine unbroken filly now in the yard was there merely incidentally. But as she was there, Ivey—otherwise Owen—O'Neill, one of the volunteers and the crack rough-rider on the station, must needs proceed with her handling. She was one of a number that had got away weeks before into the Wild Horse Gullies, and only two days ago, after a very merry ride, had the stockmen yarded her.

The talk round the yard was all of war, interspersed with words of wisdom relative to horseflesh, and in particular the filly now in hand.

Presently, with unassuming air, a selector who lived some distance away rode up.

"Here's Joe Larkin," said Jack Sutton, another of the volunteers, who saw Joe first. "Hello, Joe. Good-day, Joe!" he sang out.

"Good-day, Joe!" cried another. "'Day, Joe!" bawled a third, and, amid much merriment, round swept a repeating chorus of "Good-day, Joe," drawn forth principally by the entire simplicity of Joe's appearance.

Quite abashed by the tumult his unassuming advent had made, Joe advanced to a group at the fence, put one foot and one arm each on a rail, and in a voice as unassuming as his appearance replied to his laughing and calling associates. He did not seem to realise that there was a joke on at his expense, and turned his soft violet eyes and serious kind face from one to the other in perfect good faith.

Joe rarely smiled, but when he did there was a peculiar winsomeness about the smile. It seemed to throw sunshine through the light cloud of brown beard which, soft and curly and virgin, no razor had touched. He wore an old tweed coat, a Crimean shirt, moleskin trousers, hob-nailed boots, and one spur.

"Here's the man for the bush contingent," cried Sutton. "A man of blood from his youth up, eh, Joe?"

"That's him," cried Bob Archer, the flash man of the run. "The wrathful dove ain't a patch on him."

"Let's put him through the riding test," said Jack Archer, Bob's brother. "Jump on this filly, Joe. Look at her, the beauty. Her tail has curls in it just like your beard."

"Never you mind Joe's beard," called out Ivey O'Neill. "It's soft, an' the girls like it, don't they, Joe?"

Joe listened quietly to the banter. At last—

"Why don't you volunteer an' come along wi' us, Joe?" inquired Ivey.

"I have volunteered," said Joe. "I wrote away yesterday that I'd be in Sydney next week."

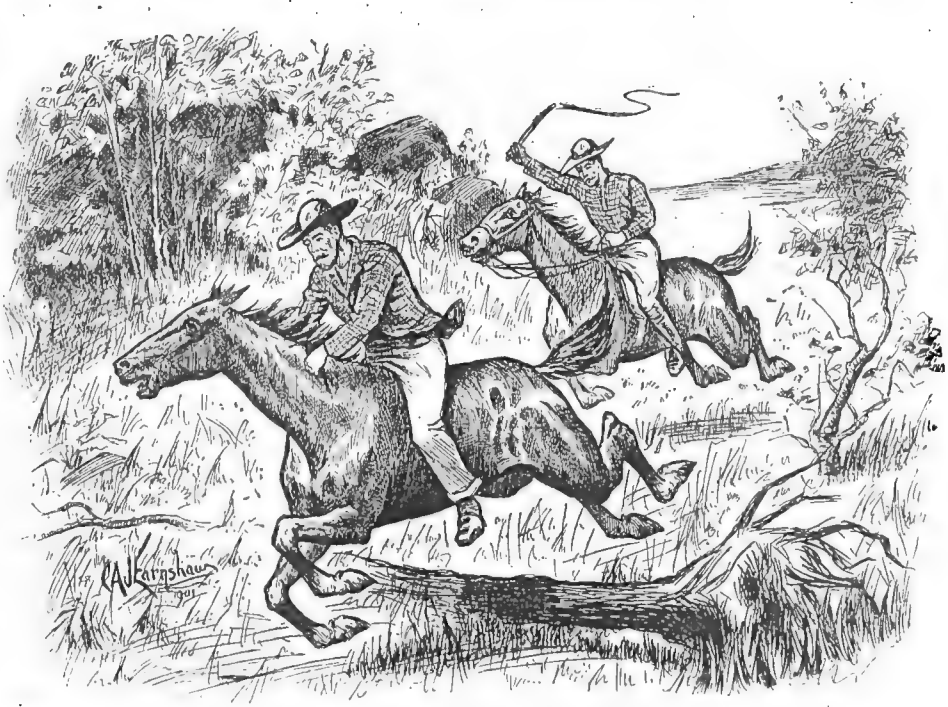
"You? Good lad!" cried Sutton, grasping Joe's hand.

Then there was more or less of an uproar, ending with "Three cheers for Joe."

Joe stood up very straight. He was of a type that can go all day and night, sleep anywhere and eat anything—light, muscular, and wiry.

"The boss might give you a horse, Joe, same as us," said Sutton.

"I'd like that filly," said Joe, watching Ivey dexterously working his way about her.



On they flew, the filly putting forth all her powers.

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"She'd break your neck first thing. You don't profess to be a rider, do you?" said Bob Archer, who was a comparatively newcomer to the district.

Joe's violet eye showed a trace of lightning.

"I think I could show you the way," he said quietly.

Several of the men applauded him, and rather warm words flashed between him and Archer.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Joe at last, in the same quiet tone. "We'll take that filly out now to the Wild Horse Gullies an' let her go there with me on her, an' no saddle or bridle, and I'll bet that you an' your two brothers there can't run me in."

The other men again backed Joe, and Archer took up the challenge almost compulsorily.

Having obtained Mr. M'Kinnon's consent, the men set off for the chosen spot—rough, open country, which in former days had swarmed with wild horses.

Ivey led the filly, Sutton backing him up, while Joe jogged along on his rough little mare, looking like anything but a wild horse tamer.

The conditions were that Archer and his two brothers were to run Joe into the stockyard, near the gate leading into the Wild Horse Gullies, Joe undertaking not to prevent the filly's turning whenever fairly wheeled. He was to get a start of a furlong from the others half-a-mile from the yard, and was to be yarded within three hours.

When the starting point was reached Sutton gave Joe a quick hoist upon the back of the blindfolded filly, and at the same time Ivey pulled off the fold and halter.

The mare bounded forward like beauty and strength gone mad. Joe sat her splendidly, as plunging and terrified, and crashing over fallen timber and through scrub, she made for her well known gullies.

The Archers started forward. Bob, who was on a horse that he particularly fancied, pressed on ahead to take the first wheel, his brothers being content to keep in sight for a time.

Then followed some magnificent riding. Straight down a rocky hill thundered Joe, Archer following no less gallantly, and taking advantage of a risky short cut. Behind came his brothers, and then eight or ten horsemen eager to see the fun.

For a mile and a half the utmost that Archer could do was to keep Joe well in sight. Then, by taking advantage of another short cut, he drew close up. The filly was making for a well-known gap, and Archer's great object was to prevent her going down it.

Straight and fast he rode, while the filly, afraid, made a slight detour in spite of Joe's efforts to steer her. On they flew, the filly—by this time desperate but with recovered senses—putting forth all her powers, while Archer did the same.

Nearer they drew to the gap—almost reached it—and then, at the last moment, Archer's advantageous straight run came to his aid. His whip rang out, as with a "Whoa back there!" he wheeled the filly from the entrance to the gap.

Onward to the left she pressed along an old fence, but Jack Archer, cutting across from the rear, wheeled her again a quarter of a mile further on. She took a turn behind him, and with deep-drawn breath fairly outpaced his stock horse, and drew ahead on the course from which he had tried to turn her.

"Squad, right turn! Dismiss!"

Then in came the third rider, Dick Archer, getting so close that he lashed at the filly with his whip, and pressed her hard for three hundred yards. She was heading for a break-neck track, and Joe, his shirt torn and his face bleeding from scratches, crammed her at it. Down into a precipitous gully she bounded, her perilous descent getting her fairly away from her pursuers.

The last the spectators saw was the filly toiling up a distant and rocky pathway, while two of the Archers, on their nearly blown horses, followed three hundred yards in the rear. Bob Archer was limping home without his horse.

Joe was not yarded, but half-an-hour after the expiration of the time limit he rode the filly, dripping and at a jog, up to the spot from which he had started.

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He stayed at the men's quarters that night, and was made much of. But an attempt to get a speech out of him was an absolute failure.

Later in the evening Mr. M'Kinnon came along.

"Well, Joe, I hear the riding exercise has been successful this afternoon; also that you are volunteering for South Africa?"

"Yes, sir," answered Joe.

"Then take your pick of the station horses. Have you any fancy?"

"I'd like that filly—well," said Joe, looking at Mr. M'Kinnon in his simple, steadfast way.

"Take her, my lad, and welcome," was the reply.

II.

Joe was one of two sons. His father was an idle, humorous man, who periodically drank himself blind. His brother Fred was an idle man without the humour, who drank rather more than his father, and was regarded as generally useless.

Joe, who, like many bushmen, neither drank nor smoked, had been a kind of free slave to the rest of the family all his life. His mother was a woman who had suffered bitter hardship, and came out with a bitter spirit and tongue. Joe recognised the hard battle she had fought, and stood by her loyally, though her grumbling was directed principally against him.

Fred alone escaped her tongue, careless whether he did or not, and Joe felt, not without passing anger, that a great deal of the hard-earned money which he handed his mother went to Fred. He felt also that his mother would be determinedly opposed to his leaving, and often thought, with a cut-off-his-nose-to-spite-his-face sense of duty, that he ought to stay at home and keep things together. But an indefinable longing was upon him to go and see and do, and go he must.

He felt sure of the sympathy of his father, who himself was an old soldier. When he reached home on the day after his ride on the filly, Joe went straight to his father. The old man held himself like a soldier, for all his lame leg and absolute deafness—arising from his having slept with it in a mud puddle all night—of one ear. "And I wish he was deaf in the other, too," his wife often said.

Old Larkin was enthusiastic over the matter.

"You go, Joe," he said. "Women always want men to stay at home, more's the pity. Look here, Joe, you've s'aved here half your life, supportin' your —— drunken old father an' your beautiful brother. Now, I'll put the peg in, an' look after the place, an' serve the gran' old country over the sea once more by makin' it so that my flesh and blood can fight for her. You go, an' get a slappin' mouthful of raw, rank, big, enticin' life. It called to me just the same when I was young, an' the call must be answered. Ah, but if I was young again! You'll go for me. Your mother may or may not object to this project. I think she will, so it's likely she won't. She's in laager over at the pigstye now. I'll beat about out o' range while you tackle her. Perhaps I may git in the kitchen, and cut her off from her base."

Joe smiled half sadly at his father's words. He knew that the old man, but for drink, might have done much, but—the tree had fallen.

He went straight to his mother and told her briefly and simply what he had done. To his surprise she listened quietly.

"I part expected this, Joe," she said, when he had finished. "They tell me them Boers fire on women an' children, and murder men under the white flag, an' fire on our poor wounded laddies. You go, Joe. I can spare ye for this. I'm a daughter of Old England, an' you're my son."

"Good old woman," roared her husband from near at hand. "Squad, 'shun! Present—arms!"

Up went the spade he had in his hands in the true old military suit.

"Of all the old fools!" cried his wife, perhaps more vexed at being caught speaking feelingly than at anything else. "Didn't I tell you to finish that diggin', you old fool, ye? Always idle an' talkin'. Now Joe's goin' you'll have to put out another foot, I assure ye."

As her words pelted the old man he grinned jovially.

"Now ye see what it is to be steady under fire, Joe," he said, with his spade at the shoulder. "Squad, right—tarn! Dismiss!"

And off he hobbled, chuckling to himself.

Joe left for Sydney two days later. To his surprise Fred offered to ride with him to the railway town twenty miles distant.

"I'll like to go with you altogether, Joe," he said in his sullen-faced way as he grasped his brother's hand in farewell. "But the Queen doesn't want men who can't keep sober for a fortnight at a stretch."

Then, full of pity and wonder, from the carriage window Joe watched him, a pathetic, aimless figure, standing loosely on the platform as the train left.

Some time later Mr. M'Kinnon, driving past, found Joe at work on the old place.

"Hello! I thought you'd gone to the war!" he exclaimed.

Joe drew back and surveyed the post-hole he was digging, spat on his hands, then picked up the crowbar, and drove it home.

"Didn't pass, sir. They reckoned I couldn't ride," was his brief reply.

An Unfortunate Incident.

"Well," said the family doctor to little Willie's anxious father, who had sent for him in great haste, "and what is the matter with your son?"

With a voice choked with emotion, the fond parent replied:

"It happened like this, I gave Willie 3s. 6d. to spend yesterday, and he went straight to the nearest bookseller and purchased a copy of 'The New Master,' by Arnold Golsworthy ('Jingle' of *Pick-Me-Up*), and what with the fun of the story and the screamingly humorous illustrations by Tom Browne, *he has split his sides with laughing*, and I want to know whether you will be able to mend them."

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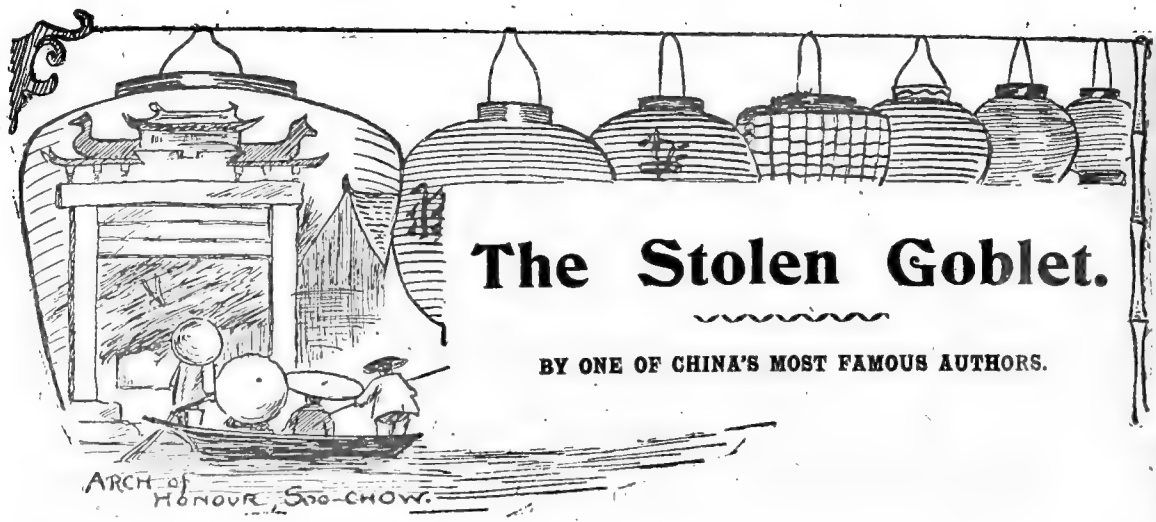

The Stolen Goblet.

BY ONE OF CHINA'S MOST FAMOUS AUTHORS.

The following story is by P'u Liu Hsien, one of China's most famous authors. He began to write romances when quite a boy. His best known work—from which this sample story is taken—is called in China the Liao Chai Chih Yi, and the fame of the book is supposed to rest upon the beauty of its style. Most European readers would perhaps scarcely indorse China's favourable verdict in this matter. It is an interesting fact, however, that though Chinese literary men are, or pretend to be, contemptuous of anything in the shape of novels or tales, they make an exception in favour of this work. Without regard to the interest of the story, we present it to our readers as a literary curiosity.

ONCE upon a time, in the town of Li-cheng, there lived a poor scholar named Yin. In the place where he lived there was a large stretch of ground, in the midst of which stood a handsome house with outhouses and courtyards attached.

These buildings were uninhabited and gradually falling into decay; while it was currently reported that the place was haunted, and that strange and fearful sights were to be seen there.

Now Yin was one day dining with some of his fellow-students, and this haunted house became the subject of the conversation. One of his companions remarked: "If any one among us will venture to sleep a night in the haunted house the rest of us will buy him a dinner, and let him order it."

Yin, on this, jumped up and cried: "Who's afraid? I will take my bedding and go there at once."

His companions took him at his word, and so Yin got his bed ready, and they escorted him to the entrance of the haunted garden, where they took leave of him, telling him to shout for help if he saw anything dreadful.

Yin laughed and assured them that whatever he saw he would catch, and bring away with him for a curiosity. So saying he went inside.

The moon at this time was in the first quarter, and it was only just possible to discover the entrance into this house by its feeble light; but after some trouble, Yin succeeded in getting in. He went upstairs into a big room, where he determined to sleep. He sat for some time waiting for something to happen, and watching the thin, new moon sinking behind the western hills. Nothing extraordinary occurred, so he spread out his bedding and went to sleep.

Presently a man dressed as a servant, and bearing in his hand a lamp shaped like a lotus-flower, entered the room, and on seeing Yin lying there started back, and then ran to the stairhead and told his companions that a man was lying there.

They asked him who the stranger was; but, as he could not tell them, an old gentleman, who appeared to be the master of the house, came up. This individual, after a long look at the sleeper, turned to his followers and said:

"This is a gentleman named Yin, a good scholar, who will be a great man one of those days. We need not mind him in the least, for he has a good heart, and even if our noise awakes him, he will be perfectly friendly with us."

When he had finished speaking, the doors of the house were thrown open and a large crowd of people flocked in. The lamps were lighted in all directions, until every room was as bright as day. Yin felt that it was foolish to pretend to be asleep any longer, so he began to toss backwards and forwards, and to make a noise as though he were clearing his throat.

The master of the house at once came forward, and, making a low bow, addressed him thus:

"Your servant has a poor daughter who is to be married to-night. We did not expect to have the honour of your company, and I trust therefore that you will not be angry with us for disturbing you."

Yin got up in a hurry and made a low bow in return, and replied:

"I was unaware of these festivities to-night. Had I known I would have come prepared, and would have brought a wedding gift."

"Your presence," rejoined the old man, "is better than any wedding gift, for it drives away all evil influences. I shall, therefore, be grateful if you will give us the honour of your company."

Yin accepted the invitation with much pleasure, and then he and his host betook themselves to another room, where everything was laid out with the greatest splendour.

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Here was a lady of some forty years of age, who came forward to greet Yin, and was introduced by the old gentleman as his wife. Just then a sound of horns and other instruments was heard, and a servant came in to announce the arrival of the bridegroom. The old gentleman went to the door to receive his son-in-law, and introduced him to Yin.

It was not long before the ladies flocked in in a bevy, and then the servants brought in the supper. But in addition to eatables the board was decked with jewelled bowls and gold cups, in which wine was handed to the guests.

Yin observed the bride closely, and thought that she must be the fairest woman in the world, but just then the current of his thoughts changed, because the wine was being handed round in magnificent golden goblets. each of which would contain several measures of wine.

As one of these came within his reach he slipped it up his sleeve and then leant his head on the table as though he had fallen into a drunken sleep. Shortly afterwards the company broke up.

The old gentleman now ordered the servants to clear the tables, and one of the large gold cups was found to be missing. Search was made everywhere. One of the servants remarked that perhaps the sleeping stranger had taken it, but the host bade him angrily to be quiet and not to make a fool of himself by insulting his guests.

The old gentleman and his followers then took their departure, leaving Yin still sitting at the table. When they were gone, Yin got up. The place was now, of course, pitch dark, and he might have thought all his adventures a dream had it not been that he had the cup up his sleeve.

In a short time the eastern sky began to grow red and the day to break, so he rolled up his bedding and walked down to the gate, where he found his friends waiting for him. Yin told them his adventures, and produced his golden cup.

A few years after these occurrences Yin took his doctoral degree, and was appointed to an office in Fei Chiu, in the Province of Honan. At that place lived a rich man named Chu. He invited Yin to dinner one day, and ordered the servants to put out the best gold cups.

It was some time before this order was obeyed, and while the cups were being placed on the table, the butler whispered something to his master, which seemed to disconcert him considerably. Seven large gold cups were now handed round, and Yin saw to his astonishment that they were exactly like the goblet which he had stolen at the marriage feast in the haunted house. He turned to his host and asked him where he had procured these cups.

"My father," replied Chu, "had an office in Pekin, and, when there, happened to hear of a goldsmith whose work was considered wonderfully artistic and elegant. My father commissioned him to make a set of eight drinking cups, which cups have since come down to me as a heirloom in our family. I regret to say, however, that though the box which holds these cups has been locked and sealed for fifteen years, one of the golden goblets has mysteriously disappeared. I don't understand it at all. I believe one of my servants must have stolen it and forged my seals."

"Possibly," replied Yin with a laugh, "the cup itself made wings and flew away. But I know what I will do. I have a goblet at home of the same pattern as this, and, as a single cup is of no use to me, I will send it to you to complete your set."

Chu expressed thanks, and Yin on his return home sent the stolen cup to his friend, with a full account of how he had obtained it.

Moral: Sooner or later stolen things revert to their proper owners.

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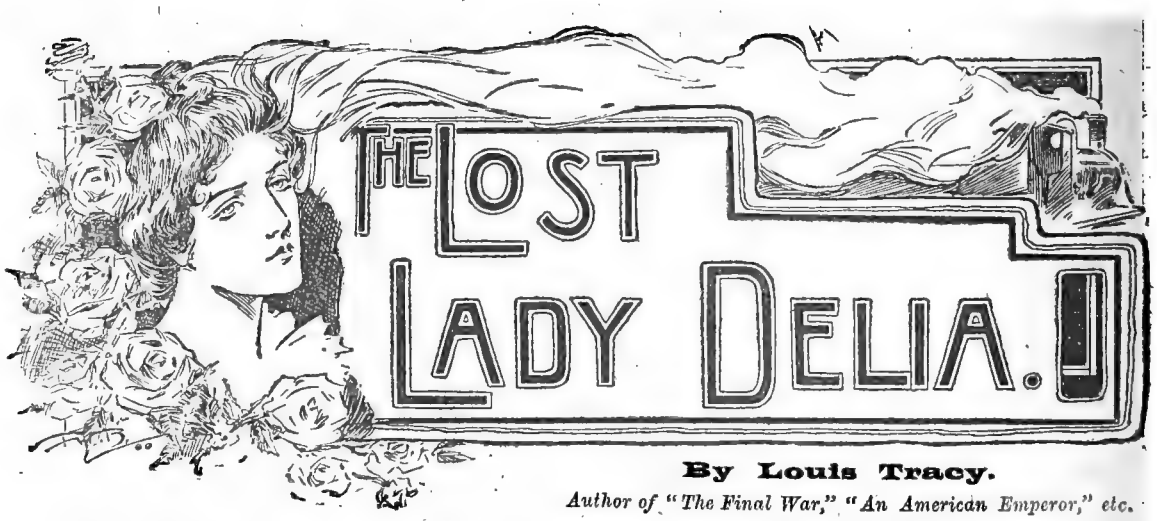

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER XXV. (*continued*).

His visitor was so utterly disconsolate that Brett was at a loss to know how to deal with him.

He felt that if Mensmore would but speak regarding Mrs. Hilmer's strange delusion, and the cause of it, all these difficulties and disasters would disappear. He resolved to try a direct attack.

"Have you ever heard of a Colonel Montgomery?" he said suddenly, bending his searching gaze on the other's downcast face.

The effect was electrical.

Mensmore was so taken aback that he was spellbound. He looked at Brett, the picture of astonishment, before he stammered:

"I—you—who told you about him?"

"He was your sister's friend, adviser, and confidant," he replied sternly. "He it is who, in some way, is bound up with Lady Delia's disappearance."

Mensmore rose excitedly.

"I cannot discuss the matter with you," he cried, "I have given my sacred promise, and no matter what the cost may be I will not break my word."

"I do not press you. But may I see Mrs. Hilmer again? When she is calmer I might reason with her."

The other placed his hand on Brett's shoulder, and his voice was very impressive, though shaken with some strong emotion:

"Believe me," he said, "it is better that you should not see her. It will be useless. She is leaving London, not to avoid consequences, but to get away from painful memories. Her departure will be quite open, and her place of residence known to anyone who cares to inquire. One thing she is immovable in. She will never reveal to a living soul what she knows of Lady Delia's death. She would rather suffer at the hands of the law any punishment that might be meted out to her."

"Don't you understand that this man, Montgomery, is now known to the police. Sooner or later he will be found and asked to explain any connection he may have had with the crime. Why not accomplish quietly that which will perforce be done through the uncompromising channels of Scotland Yard?"

"Your reasoning appears to be good, but——"

"But folly must prevail?"

"Put it that way if you like."

"So this wretched imbroglio may cost you the love of a charming and devoted girl?"

"Heaven help me, it may—probably will."

"I swear to you," cried the barrister, who was unusually excited, "that I will tear the heart out of this mystery before the week expires."

Mensmore bowed silently and would have left the room, but Smith entered. In their distraction they had not heard the bell ring. Smith handed a card to his master. Instantly Brett controlled himself. His admiration for the dramatic sequence of events overcame his eagerness as an actor. It was with an appreciative smile that he said, without the slightest reference to Mensmore:

"Show the lady in."

Mensmore was passing out, but the sight of the visitor drove him back as though he had been struck. It was Phyllis Browne.

Her recognition of him was a bright smile. She advanced to Brett, saying pleasantly:

"I am glad to meet you, though the manner of my call is somewhat unconventional. I heard much of you from Bertie in the Riviera, and more since my return to town."

Brett suitably expressed his delight at this apparition. Mensmore, not knowing what to do, stood awkwardly at the other end of the room.

Neither of the others paid the least heed to him.

"Of course I had a definite object in coming to see you, Mr. Brett,' went on the young lady. "I have been coolly told that, because somebody killed somebody else some months ago, a young gentleman who asked me to be his wife, is not only not going to marry me but intends to spend the rest of his life in Central Africa or China—anywhere in fact but where I may be."

"A most unwise resolve," said the barrister.

"So I thought. You appear to hold the key of the situation, Mr. Brett; and as it is an easy matter to trace you through the Directory, here I am. My people think I am skating at St. James'."

"Well, Miss Browne," said Brett, "I am neither judge nor jury nor counsel for the prosecution, but there is the culprit. I hand him over to you."

"Yes, but that goose didn't kill anybody, did he?"

"No."

"And I am sure his sister did not; from what little I saw of her she would not hurt a fly."

"Quite true."

"Then why don't you find the man who caused all the mischief—and—and—lock him up at least, so that he can't go on injuring people?"

Miss Phyllis was very brave and self-confident at the outset. Now she was on the verge of tears, for Mensmore's

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saddened face and depressed manner unnerved her more than his passionate words at their last interview.

"You ask me a straight question," replied Brett, though his eyes were fixed on Mensmore, "and I will give you a straight answer. I *will* find the man who killed Lady Delia. As you say, it is time his capacity for doing injury to others should be limited. Before many days have passed, Mr. Mensmore will come to you and beg your pardon for his hasty and quite unwarranted resolve."

"Do you hear that, Bertie?" cried the girl. "Didn't I tell you so?"

Mensmore came forward to her side of the table,

"I need not wait, Phil, dear," he said simply. "I ask your pardon now. This business is in the hands of Providence. I was foolish to think that anything I could do would stave off the inevitable."

"And if you have—to go—to China—you w-will take me with you?"

Brett looked out of the window, whistled, and said loudly, addressing a beautiful lady in short skirts who figured in a poster across the way:

"Let me ring for some tea. All this talk makes one dry."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Lady Helen Montgomery's Son.

When the young people had gone out—Mensmore ill at ease, though tremulously happy that Phyllis had so demonstrated her trust in him, Phyllis herself radiantly confident in the barrister's powers to set everything right—Brett devoted himself to the task of determining a new line for his energies.

The first step was self-evident. He must ascertain if the Lyles knew a Colonel Montgomery.

He drove to the club frequented by Sir Charles, in the first place; but the baronet was not there, so he went to Wensley House.

Sir Charles was at home, in his accustomed nook by the library fire. He looked ill and low-spirited. The temporary animation he had displayed during the past few weeks was gone. If anyth ng, he was more listless than at any time since his wife's death.

"Well, Brett," he said, "anything to report?"

"Yes, a good deal."

"What is it?"

"I want to ask you something. Did you ever know a Colonel Montgomery, or was your wife acquainted with anyone of that name to your knowledge?"

"I do not think she was. Had she ever met such a man I should probably have heard of him. Who was he?"

The baronet's low state rendered his words careless and indefinite, but his friend did not wish to bother him unduly.

"The police have discovered," he said, "that Mrs. Hilmer formed a close intimacy with someone whom she designated by that name and rank, though I have failed to trace any British officer who answers to his description. He disappeared, or died, as some people put it, about the same time as your wife."

"Is it not known what became of him then?"

"No."

"Won't Mrs. Hilmer tell you?"

"She absolutely refuses to give any help whatever."

"On what ground?"

"That is best known to herself. My theory is that a man she loves is implicated in this affair, and she is prepared to go to any lengths to shield him."

"Ah!"

Sir Charles bent over and poked the fire viciously. Then he murmured: "Women are queer creatures, Brett. We men never understand them until too late. My wife and I

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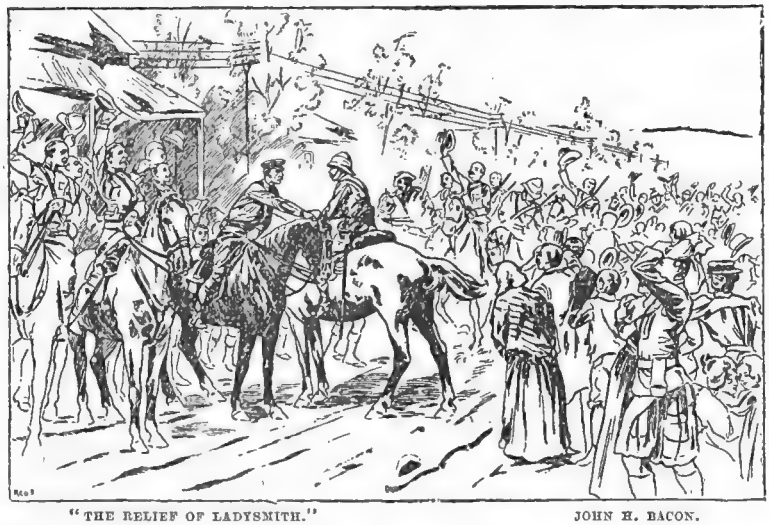

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never cared a jot for one another whilst she lived, to all appearance. Yet I now realise that she loved me, and I would give the little remaining span of existence, dear as life is, to see her once more."

This was a morbid subject, so Brett tried to switch him off it.

"It is almost clear to me," he said, "that this Colonel Montgomery's name was assumed. Few people realise the use of the alias made in modern life. I have a notion that the custom amongst otherwise honourable people has arisen from the publicity given to the fact that Royal and other distinguished personages frequently choose to conceal their identity under less known territorial titles."

"The idea is ingenious. We are all slaves of fashion."

"However that may be, it should not be a difficult task to lay hands on this gentleman should he be still living."

"Suppose you succeed. How can you connect him with my wife's death?"

"At this moment I am unable to say. But the cabman might be of some use."

"The cabman. What cabman?"

"Did I omit that? I ought to have told you that I have found the driver of the four-wheeler in which poor Lady Delia was taken, dead or insensible, from Sloane Square to Putney."

"What an extraordinary thing!"

"What is?"

"That you should have forgotten to inform me of such a striking fact."

"Not so. Now that I recollect, I have not had the opportunity. It was impossible to discuss anything else but that letter on the last two occasions we met, and it was only a few hours prior to your visit on Monday that I got the cabman's story fully. By the way, do you now see any reason why Jane Harding should have tried to deceive you in such a manner?"

The barrister perceived that Sir Charles was nervous and irritable, so he deemed it a needless strain to enlarge on the history of his discovery of Foxey.

"I am tired of letters, and plots, and mysteries. My life is resolving itself into one huge note of interrogation. Soon the great question of eternity will dominate all others."

Lyle's mood unfitted him for sustained conversation. Brett could but pity him, and hope that time would calm his fevered brain, and still the unrest that shed this gloom over him.

"Really," said Reggie after a long interval, during which both men sought inspiration from the dancing flames in the fire-place, "really this is too bad of you, Lyle. You showed a marked improvement for a little space, and now you are letting yourself slip back into a state of lonely and unoccupied moping again."

"My thoughts find me both occupation and company," was the despondent reply.

"There is nothing for it," continued Brett cheerfully, "but a tour round the world. You must start immediately. A complete change of scene and surroundings will soon pull you back to a normal state of mind and health."

"I have been thinking of a long journey for some time past."

The barrister glanced sharply at his friend. The *double entendre* was not lost on him. Lyle was in a very depressed and nervous condition. The uncertainty regarding his wife's fate was harassing him unduly, and it was with a twinge of conscience that Brett reflected upon his own eagerness to pursue a quest which, by very reason of its indefiniteness, attracted him as an intellectual pursuit.

"Look here, Lyle," he cried, on the spur of the moment, "I have long desired to see the Canadian-Pacific route. Will you arrange to start West with me a fortnight hence? We will return when the spirit moves us."

"We will see. We will see. To-day I feel unable to decide anything."

"Yes, I know, but the mere fact that you take the resolution will serve to re-animate you."

"It is very good of you, Brett, to trouble so about me. Had you asked me earlier I might have gone straight away. But let it rest for a little while. When I have recovered my spirits somewhat I will come to you to ask you to sail next day, or something of that sort."

Beyond this Brett could not move him.

In pursuance of his promise to Phyllis Browne he lost no time in striving to finally solve the problem of Lady Delia's disappearance.

There was one link in the chain of evidence that would be irrefragable if discovered. Was this Colonel Montgomery in any way connected with the house at Putney where the murderer had disposed of the body? If this could be established the unknown visitor to Raleigh Mansions would experience a good deal of difficulty in clearing himself from suspicion, as Brett was certain that, once the "Colonel" was traced, much would come to light regarding him to explain Mrs. Hilmer's, and her brother's, dread lest his identity should be discovered.

An inquiry addressed to the house agents to whom possible tenants were referred elicited the information that the present owner, a lady, was prepared to let the house annually or on a lease. They inclosed an order to view, which Brett retained in case he should happen to need it.

A second letter gave him the address of the lady's solicitors, Messrs. Small and Sharp, Lincoln's Inn.

To them Brett betook himself on the Wednesday afternoon. He posed as a possible tenant, with a desire to purchase the property outright if this proposal could be entertained.

Mr. Sharp, the partner who dealt with this estate, became very suave when the suggestion reached his ears.

"You will understand, Mr. Brett, that your request requires some consideration. The rent my client asks is comparatively low, because the house is old-fashioned, but the splendid riparian position of the property, a freehold acre on the banks of the Thames at Putney, gives it a highly-increased future value. Any figure you may have based on a rental calculation would therefore——"

"Not meet the case at all," said Brett, repressing a smile at the familiar first move in the game of bargaining.

"Precisely."

"May I ask you who the present owner is?"

"Certainly. The lady's name is Small. In fact, she is my partner's wife. Her father, the late Rev. Septimus Childe, purchased the estate some years ago, largely because the house suited his requirements as the head of a very successful private school."

"Has the estate changed hands frequently then?"

"Oh, dear no. Indeed, it is well understood that the Rev. Mr. Childe acquired it more as a friendly transaction than otherwise. The place is a portion of the separate estate of the late Lady Helen Montgomery, who married Sir William Lyle, father of the present baronet, who perhaps—good gracious, my dear sir, what is the matter?"

Had Brett been a woman he must have fainted.

As it was, the shock of the intelligence nearly paralysed him. Sir Charles Lyle!—Montgomery!—the house at Putney the property of his mother! What new terror did not this frightful combination suggest?

Why did his friend conceal from him these most important facts? Why did he pretend ignorance not only of the locality, but of his mother's maiden name. Like lightning the remembrance flashed through Brett's troubled brain that he had only heard of the earlier Lady Lyle as a daughter of the Earl of Tilbury. A suspicion—profoundly horrible, yet convincing—was slowly mastering him, and every second brought further proof not only of its reasonableness, but of its ghastly and inflexible certainty.

(*Continued on page* 348.)

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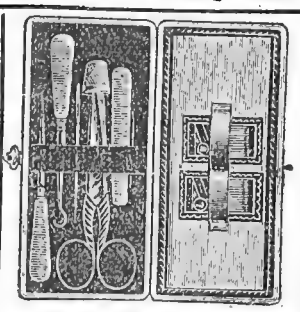

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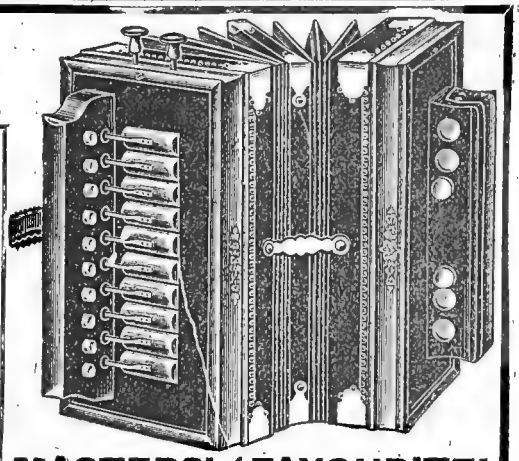

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Again the lawyer's voice reached his ears, dully and thin, as though it penetrated through a wall.

"Surely you have been taken suddenly ill? Let me get you some brandy."

"No—no," murmured the barrister. "It is but a momentary faintness. I—I think I will go out into the fresh air. Are you—quite sure—that Mr. Childe bought the property from Lady Helen Montgomery's trustees?"

"Quite sure. If you can wait even a few moments I will show you the title-deeds."

"No, thank you. I will call again. Pray excuse me."

Somehow Brett reached the quiet square of the Inn, and then plunged into the turmoil of the street. Amidst the bustle of Holborn he had a curious sensation of safety. The fiend so suddenly installed in his consciousness was less busy here suggesting strange and maddening thoughts.

Why — why — why — fifty questions beat incessantly against the barrier of agonised negation he strove to set up, but the noise of the traffic made the attack confused. Each incautious bump against a passer-by silenced a demand, each heavy crunch of a 'bus on the gravel-strewed roadway temporarily silenced a doubt.

He was so unmanned that he felt almost on the verge of tears. He absolutely dared not attempt to reason out the fearful alternative which had so fiercely thrust itself upon him.

At last he became vaguely aware that people were staring at him. Fearful lest some acquaintance should recognise and accost him he hailed a hansom and drove to Victoria Street.

All the way the steady beat of the horse's feet served to distract his thoughts. He forced himself to count the quick paces, and tried hard to accommodate the numerals of two or more syllables to the rapidity of the animal's trot. He failed in this, but in the failure found relief.

Nevertheless, though the horse was willing and the driver eager to oblige a fare who gave a "good" address, the time seemed interminable until the cab stopped in front of his door.

Once there, he slowly ascended the stairs to his own flat, told Smith to pay the cabman half-a-crown and to admit no one, and threw himself into a chair.

At last he was face to face with the troublous demon who possessed him in Lincoln's Inn, struggled with him through the crowd, and travelled with him in the hansom. Phyllis Browne should have her answer sooner than he had expected.

The man who murdered Lady Delia was Sir Charles Lyle, her husband.

"Oh, Heavens!" moaned Brett, as he swayed restlessly to and fro in his chair; "is it possible?"

He sat there for hours. Smith entered, turned on the lights and suggested tea, but received an impatient dismissal.

After another long interval, Smith appeared again, to announce that Mr. Winter had called.

"Did you not say I was out?" said Brett, his hollow tones and haggard air startling his faithful servitor considerably.

"Yes, sir—oh, yes, sir. But that's no use with Mr. Winter. He said as how he was sure you were in."

"Ask him to oblige me by coming again—to-morrow. I am very ill. I really cannot see him."

Smith left the room, but only to return and say:

"Mr. Winter says, sir, his business is of the *hutmost* himportance. He can't leave it; and he says you will be very sorry afterwards if you don't see him now."

"Oh, so be it," cried Brett, turning desperately to a spirit-stand to seek sustenance in a stiff glass of brandy. "Send him in."

Quite awed by the circumstances, Smith admitted the detective and closed the door upon the two standing looking at each other without a word of greeting or explanation

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mr. Winter's Method.

The policeman spoke first. "Has Jane Harding been here, then?" he said.

His words conveyed no meaning to his hearer. They were so incongruous, so ridiculously unreasoning, that Brett laughed hysterically.

"You must have seen her," cried Mr. Winter, excitedly. "I know you have learnt the truth, and in no other way that I can imagine could it have reached you."

"Learnt what truth?"

"That Sir Charles Lyle himself is at the bottom of all this business."

"Indeed. How have you blundered upon that solution?"

"Look here, Mr. Brett, this time I am right, and you know it. It was Sir Charles Lyle who killed his wife. Nobody else had anything to do with it, so far as I can guess. But if you haven't seen Jane Harding, I wonder how you found out."

"You are speaking in riddles. Pray explain yourself."

"If Sir Charles Lyle had not been out of town, the riddle would have been answered by this time in the easiest way, as I should have locked him up."

"Excellent. You remain faithful to tradition."

"Mr. Brett, please don't try to humbug me. I am quite in earnest. I have come to you for advice. Sir Charles Lyle is guilty right enough."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"To help me as to the proper course. The whole thing seems so astounding that I can hardly trust my own senses. I spoke hastily just now. I would not have touched Sir Charles before consulting you. I was never in such a mixed-up condition in my life."

Whatever the source of his information, the detective had evidently arrived at the same conclusion as Brett himself. There was nothing for it but to endeavour to calmly reason out the situation and adopt the best method of dealing with it suggested by their joint intelligence. Brett motioned the detective to a chair, imposed silence by a look, and summoned Smith. He was faint from want of food. With returning equanimity he resolved first to restore his strength, as he would need all his powers to deal with events before he slept that night.

Mr. Winter, nothing loth, joined him in a simple meal, and by tacit consent no reference was made to the one engrossing topic in their thoughts until the table had been cleared.

"And now, Mr. Winter," said Brett, "what have you found out?"

"During the last two days," was the reply, "I have been unsuccessfully trying to trace Colonel Montgomery. No matter what I did I failed. I got hold of several of Mrs. Hilmer's tradespeople, but she always pays her bills with her own cheques, and none of them had ever heard of a Colonel Mont omery. That furniture business puzzled me a lot. The change of the drawing-room set from one flat to another on November 7th, I mean. So I found out the address of the people who supplied the new articles to Mrs. Hilmer——"

"How?"

"Through the maid, Dobson. Mrs. Hilmer has given her notice to leave, and the girl is furious about it, as she appears to have had a very easy place there. I think it came to Mrs. Hilmer's ears that she talked a lot with me."

"I see. Proceed."

"Here I hit upon a slight clue. It was a gentleman who ordered the new furniture, and directed the transfer of the articles replaced from No. 61 to No. 12, Raleigh Mansions. He did this early in the morning of November 7th, and the foreman in charge of the job remembered that there was some bother about it, as neither Mrs. Hilmer nor Mr. Pyne, as Mensmore used to be called, knew anything about it to

(*Continued on page* 350.)

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A Boon to Dyspeptics.

Quoted from "The Lady."

"In these high-pressure days, when men and women alike have to work incessantly with brain and hand to hold their own in the great battle of life, it is the exception rather than the rule to find any one who does not suffer from that insiduous and most distressing complaint—Dyspepsia—in one form or another. The most general symptoms of this disease—for it invariably develops into a disease if its progress remains unchecked—are loss of Appetite on most occasions, varied by craving desires for food which is extremely indigestible; fearful Depression of Spirits, together with various aches and pains in nearly every part of the body; the digestive organs refuse to perform their offices in a perfect manner, and if neglected, the result is too often apparent in the contraction of cancer or tumour in the Stomach, abcess on the Liver, and many serious internal complications. The great remedies for these evils, if taken when Dyspepsia has not yet assumed its later and, in fact, fatal phases, are a really good tonic and a careful diet, combined with sensible Health precautions; but hitherto no entirely satisfactory tonic for Dyspeptics has been discovered, as most preparations of the kind contain iron or quinine in some form, which, though valuable preparations in many cases, are devoid of digestive qualities. The preparation known as Guy's Tonic is, however, a wonderfully efficacious remedy. It is entirely free from iron, and therefore does not induce Constipation, a most important consideration. It contains no quinine either, but is composed of Vegetable tinctures from the British Pharmacopœia, and is prepared from the formula of a London physician. It is more than a tonic, as besides strengthening the whole Nervous System and correcting a Sluggish Liver, it assists the process of Digestion in a very great degree; moreover, it is pleasant to take."

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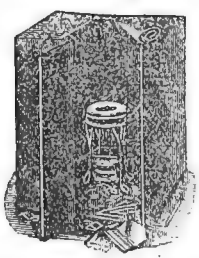

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all appearance. But the gentleman came the same morning and explained matters. It struck the foreman as funny there should be such a fearful hurry about refurnishing a drawing-room, for the gentleman did not care what the cost was so long as the job was carried out at express speed. Another odd thing was that Mrs. Hilmer paid for the articles, though she had not ordered them nor did she appear to want them. The man was quite certain that Mr. Mensmore's first knowledge of the affair came with the arrival of the first batch of articles from Mrs. Hilmer's flat, but he could only describe the mysterious agent as being a regular swell. He afterwards identified a portrait of Sir Charles Lyle as being exactly like the man he had seen, if not the man himself."

"How did you come to have a portrait of Sir Charles in your possession?"

"That appears later," said the detective, full of professional pride at the undoubtedly smart manner in which he had manipulated his facts once they were placed in order before him.

"Of course," he went on, "I jumped to the conclusion that the stranger was this Colonel Montgomery. Then, whilst closely questioning the maid about the events of November 7, she suddenly remembered that she had lost an old coat and skirt about that date. They had vanished from her room, and she had never laid eyes on them since. This set me thinking. I confronted her with the clothes worn by Lady Delia when she was found in the river, and I'm jiggered if Dobson didn't recognise them at once as being her missing property. Now, wasn't that a rum go?"

"It certainly was," said Brett, who was piecing together the story of the murder in his mind as each additional detail came to light.

"Naturally I thought harder than ever after that. It then occurred to me that Jane Harding must have had some powerful reasons for so suddenly shutting up about the identification of her mistress' underclothing. She was right enough, as we now know, in regard to the coat and skirt, but she admitted to me that the linen on the dead body was just the same as Lady Delia's. Curiously enough, it was not marked by initials, crest, or laundry-mark, and I ascertained months ago that owing to some fad of her ladyship's, all the family washing was done on the estate in Yorkshire. This explained the absence of the otherwise inevitable laundry mark."

"Thus far you are coherence itself."

"Well," said Mr. Winter complacently, "I was a long time getting to work, Mr. Brett, and had it not been for your help I should never, probably, have got at the truth, but I flatter myself that, once on the right track, I seldom leave it. However, as I was saying, I felt that Jane Harding knew a good deal more than she would tell, except under pressure, so I decided to put that pressure on."

"In what way?"

"I frightened her. Played off on her a bit of the stage business she is so fond of. This afternoon I placed a pair of handcuffs in my pocket and went to her place at Bloomsbury, having previously filled in a bogus warrant for her arrest on a charge of complicity in the murder of Lady Delia."

"It was a dangerous game, Mr. Winter!"

"Very. If it had gone wrong and had reached the ears of the Commissioner or got into the papers, I should have been reduced or dismissed. But what is a policeman to do in such cases? I was losing my temper over this infernal inquiry and never getting any real light, though always coming across startling developments. It had to end somehow, and I took the chance. The make-believe warrant and the production of handcuffs for a woman—they are never used, you know, in reality—have often been trump cards for us when everything else failed."

"This time, then, the 'properties' made up the 'show,' as Miss Harding would put it?"

"They did, and no mistake. I gave her no time to think or act. I found her sitting with her mother, admiring a new carpet she had just laid down. I said, 'Is your name Jane Harding, now engaged at the Jollity Theatre, under the alias of Marie le Marchant, but formerly a maid in the service of Lady Delia Lyle?' She grew very white and said, 'Yes,' whilst her mother clutched hold of her, terrified. Then I whipped out the warrant and the cuffs. My, but you should have heard them squeal when the bracelets clinked together. 'What has my child done?' screamed the mother. 'Perhaps nothing, madam,' I answered, 'but she is guilty in the eyes of the law just the same if she persists in screening the guilty parties.' Jane Harding was trembling and blubbering, but she said, 'It is very hard on me. I have done nothing.' I nearly trembled myself, then, as I feared that she might offer to come with me to the police-station, in which case I should have been dished. But the mother fixed the affair splendidly. 'I am sure my daughter will not conceal anything,' she said, 'and it is a shame to disgrace her in this way without telling her what it is you want to know.' I took the cue in an instant. 'I am empowered,' I said, 'to suspend this warrant, and perhaps do away with it altogether if she answers my questions fully and truthfully.' 'Why, of course she will,' said the mother, and the girl, though desperately upset, whimpered her agreement. With that I got the whole story."

"Sir Charles Lyle inspired her actions, I suppose?"

"From the very beginning almost. At first Jane Harding herself believed, when she gave evidence at the inquest, that the body she saw was not that of Lady Delia. But afterwards she changed her opinion, especially when she recalled the exact pattern and materials of the underclothing. Then my inquiries put her on the scent. Being rather a sharp girl, she jumped to the conclusion that Sir Charles Lyle knew more about the matter than he professed. In any case her place was gone and she would soon be dismissed, so she resolved on a plan even bolder than mine in threatening to lock her up. She watched her opportunity, got Sir Charles alone one day, and told him that from certain things that came to her knowledge she thought it her duty to go to the police-station. He was startled, she could see, and asked her the reason for her resolve. She said that her mistress had been killed, and she might be able to put the police on the right track. He hesitated, not knowing what to say, so she went on to explain that it would mean a lot of trouble for her, and she would prefer, if she had £500, to go to America and let the matter drop altogether. He told her that he did not want to have Lady Delia's name brought into public notoriety, and sooner than have such a thing occur he would give her the money. An hour later he handed her fifty ten-pound notes."

"What a wretched mistake," said Brett involuntarily. This unmasking of his unfortunate friend's duplicity was the most painful feature of all to him.

"Perhaps it was," replied Winter, "but the thing is not yet clear to me. That is why I am here. But to continue. The girl admitted that then she lost her head a bit. Instead of leaving the house openly, without attracting comment, she simply bolted, thus giving rise to the second sensational element attending Lady Delia's disappearance. But she resolved to be faithful to her promise. When you found her she held her tongue, and even wrote to Sir Charles to assure him that she had not spoken to a soul. He sent for her and pitched into her about not going to America, but took her address in case he should want to see her again."

"He recognised her letter-writing powers, no doubt."

(To be continued.)

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

As I expected, the subject of pretty girls, broached on this page a fortnight ago, has provoked a good deal of comment. "Admirer" (who, you may remember, opined that there were more pretty girls in Norwich than in any other place of its size) comes in for a good deal of cutting criticism.

"Why, Norwich cannot hold a candle in this respect to Ipswich," says "A. E.," "and I speak without prejudice, not being an inhabitant of either place."

"Commercial Traveller," who gets about a good deal, is of opinion that Huddersfield bears the palm for feminine beauty, while Leicester comes a moderate second.

"Jack" claims pride of place for Preston on the strength of his *fiancée's* looks. He sends me her photo and bluntly intimates that if I can tell him where he can find a prettier girl, why then, he'll be blowed!

"Jack" need not undergo the rude buffeting of Boreas or any other wind so far as I am concerned. His *fiancée* is extremely fair to look upon, and deserves to be the pride of Jack's heart and the pride of Preston. May I keep the photo, "Jack"?

❦❦❦

"This question which you are discussing is quite a fruitless one," remarks "Archie" in the course of a long letter. "In the first place, beauty is quite a matter of opinion, What is a beautiful face to one man may be to another nothing more than a plain one, and *vice versâ*. If this were not so there would be no accounting for the large number of (as I think) plain girls who are married or engaged. The fact is there are two kinds of beauty; the kind that knocks you all of a heap at first sight; and there is the other that is perhaps not apparent at first, but develops—or reveals itself—gradually as acquaintance with the subject grows. This is the more sterling beauty, the beauty that is more than 'skin deep,' that reflects the soul, fosters love, and retains possession of a man's heart once it has deeply attracted it. Mere surface beauty often fails to do this, accompanied so frequently as it is by flippancy, conceit, and shallowness of heart."

Which is a hard saying, and one with which I hasten to assure all my pretty readers, I have no desire to be associated.

"Edward P." writes to tell me that unfortunately he had in his youth but a very meagre education. What he knows he has, in a great measure, taught himself, but he finds himself lamentably ignorant on a great many subjects. This state of things he wishes to rectify. He has a laudable ambition to become a "well-read" man, and asks for hints as to a profitable course of study.

It is not easy to recommend books without knowing a man's specific tastes and requirements, but I cannot go wrong in suggesting that Chambers' Encyclopædia would probably be the best thing for my correspondent to get. It deals with every subject under the sun, and is certainly the most complete and up-to-date publication of its kind. Moreover, the *Daily Express* is offering it just now on such easy terms as to place it within the reach of even the poorest. Particulars are given on page 351.

❦❦❦

"Touchstone" is quite unable to understand why people are pleased or otherwise by music. To him one tune is like another, merely being a meaningless succession of monotonous sounds.

My correspondent probably suffers from "tone deafness," a disability which bears something of the same relation to the ear, as colour-blindness does to the eye. His is not a unique case, though the misfortune cannot be said to be common. A well-known Irish peer suffers similarly. On his own confession he is unable to distinguish, so far as the melody is concerned, between "Home, Sweet Home" and the National Anthem.

❦❦❦

Like many another person, "H. R." is desirous of making money. But not being able to earn much in his employment, he has lately sought to increase his capital by betting on horses and playing cards, with results the reverse of those for which he hoped.

Which is the order of things more often than not. "H. R." is doing a very foolish thing. Avoiding altogether the ethics of gambling, with which it is not my province to deal, I would recommend my correspondent to forswear the habit at once. The ways of the racecourse are devious, full of pitfalls for the uninitiated, and replete with every species of trick and roguery. A story in next week's *Short Stories* will vividly exemplify this.

If you must make money (and a reasonable quantity of it is a desirable acquisition), stick to work, my friend. Work hard—work, if need be, when idle folks are playing. Industry always tells in the long run.

❦❦❦

"C. Brabin, Jun." (Liverpool) has been a reader of *Short Stories* for some years, and thinks the number containing the first stories in the two new series one of the best he has seen.

For which kind and cheering words I thank him heartily, and all other readers who have written their appreciation of the new features.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

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A Treat for the Children.

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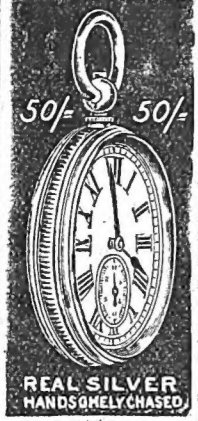

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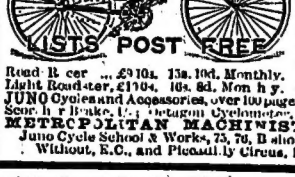

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